

*REGULATING RELIGION: CASE STUDIES FROM AROUND THE GLOBE* edited by JAMES T RICHARDSON, Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2004, ix + 578 pp (£59) ISBN hardback 0-306-47886-2, paperback 0-306-47887-0

This substantial volume was published in 2004 and most of its 33 chapters were finalised around 2002. About half of these chapters are updated versions of material previously published in journals a little before that. This is not said by way of criticism, but to help contextualise the collection, the focus of which (in the eyes of the editor) concerns the manner in which cults and sects - New Religious Movements - have been regulated. There is much of intrinsic interest in its various chapters, but the overwhelming impression that this reviewer is left with is that no matter how important the topic was, and remains, it is not as central to the regulation of religion as it once was. A reader picking up a book carrying this title today would expect a rather different - and broader - focus. The problem of regulating religion is no longer (if it ever was) one of the responses to new religious movements.

The first two parts of the book focus on the reactions of various states to NRMs, the first looking at the hostile response in a number of Western European countries, and this being contrasted with the more benign response by others in the second. Naturally, the French experience is the subject of detailed commentary and analysis spanning four chapters, the highlight of which is perhaps the chapter by James Beckford, in which he accepts that his earlier analyses of the situation in France had not taken proper account of '*Laïcité*' as an undergirding factor. What is also evident from these chapters is that by the time they were concluded, the thrust of the force of the anti-cult tide was weakening and other concerns - such as Headscarves and Islam more generally - were emerging as a more defining area of debate, a point clearly made in the 'Epilogue' to Introvigne's chapter (pp 81-82) concerning the destruction of the statue of the Cosmopolitan Messiah in France on 5 September 2001, a mere week before September 11th. Much the same might be said of the chapters concerning Germany and Belgium: they both chart the rising tide of regulation aimed at NRMs, and hint at the relative weakening of the issue of 'cults' as a focus of attention as other concerns surface. The more positive responses in Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark and the UK are also presented (though the chapter on the UK (by Beckford) is primarily concerned with access to religious services by prisoners and barely fits its brief in the context of the book as a whole).

The chapters in parts 3 and 4 of the book have, by and large, a rather different focus. Part 3 looks at the treatment of minority religions in former communist countries (Russia, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Croatia and Uzbekistan) and Part 4 at their treatment in Australia, Singapore, India, Japan and China. Whilst the chapters on Japan and China (co-authored by the editor) retain the primary focus on NRMs, the others are more general country surveys of trends in the regulation of

wider aspects of religious life, looking at the dominant concerns in each and the manner in which they have been responded to. As such, they have a more contemporary feel about them. The chapter on India is particularly interesting, highlighting the difficulties in pursuing a path of secularism in a religiously divided country. This flows very nicely in the similarly broadly based chapter on Canada which opens the final part of the book, looking at North and South America. The chapter on Canada explores that country's attempt at 'managed pluralism', something that chimes closely with arguments in favour of a 'structured pluralism' for Europe. Again, there are valuable insights here. After chapters on Mexico and Argentina (which are largely focused on the response of cults), the book ends with a series of chapters exploring the experience in the USA itself. This brings the book full circle, for one of the overarching points made by the work as a whole is that many NRMs are an export from the USA, and the responses to them in Europe and elsewhere have also drawn on US approaches and techniques. This point is made particularly with regard to the claim that those associating with NRMs are victims of 'brainwashing', and a number of chapters are devoted to attacking this theory as being unsound.

This is, then, a broad ranging collection of material. Those interested in the background to, and outworking of, the concerns (bordering on fixation) in the late 1980s and 1990s with NRMs will find plenty to interest them in the opening and closing parts of the book. Those interested in broader questions of state regulation of religious life will find the 'case studies' of NRMs interesting and informative, and will find more of direct relevance in many of the chapters in the central sections of the book. It does seem, however, that the question we should be asking ourselves is why was there so much focus on NRMs in this period, rather than the forms that their regulation took. What is striking is that none of the regulatory techniques used seem particularly unusual and merely represent the redeployment of the traditional tools of state regulation against the latest perceived threat. What is truly interesting is whether these tools can - or will - be deployed again. Back in 1985 Beckford made the vital point that how societies react to NRMs says more about the societies themselves than it does about the movements. As many of these chapters make clear, NRMs are comparatively 'easy' (though often litigious) targets. It is the experience of countries such as Italy and India - which have wrestled with more deep-seated forces - that offer clues to the nature of those societies. In formulating our own responses to the problems posed by regulating religion (of whatever hue) perhaps our starting point should be 'what do we want to say of ourselves'?

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