

BOOK REVIEW:

Vasil Gluchman. *Slovak Lutheran Social Ethics*. Studies in Religion and Society, Vol. 37. Edwin Mellon Press, 1997. - reviewed by Paul Brndjar.

This is a book that should be read in its original language. To say that the English translation does not serve the author well is a grievous understatement. Thoughts are too often unclear; whole sentences, not just participles, are left dangling in mid-air; language often approaches the unintelligible. How the publisher allowed this book to go to print in this terribly unpolished and unfinished form is incomprehensible. That said, one can still speak to the content and argument of the author's work. Gluchman attempts a total survey of 19th and 20th century Lutheran social ethics. This time period spans the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Czechoslovak Republic between WWI and WWII, the Slovak puppet state of WWII, the brief reincarnation of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1945-1948, the Communist era Czechoslovakia of 1948-1989, and the newly independent Slovakia which emerged from the breakup of Czechoslovakia in 1993. However, Gluchman's quick once-over survey does not give adequate weight to the variations of these different political contexts and the attendant implications on the development and expression of social ethics.

For the specialized reader with interest in central and eastern European church life, both Lutheran and non-Lutheran, the survey does have some nuggets of interest. For example, Gluchman provides brief summaries of individuals and schools of thought. However, his analysis is built on what is for my sensibilities a too-easy dichotomy between "quietistic" Lutheran social ethics and "progressive" social ethical theory. Further, Gluchman carries out his analysis of the struggle to develop and implement a relevant social ethic within the Lutheran Church of Slovakia in an ecumenical vacuum. He offers no discussion of concurrent thought in the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox or Reformed communions. To a good degree, of course, this mirrors the current state of ecumenical affairs in today's Slovakia. Astonishingly, Guchman totally ignores the period between 1939-1945. Given the breadth and attention Gluchman devotes in his final chapter to the interplay between politico-socio-economic forces and church life and ministry during the communist era, this glaring oversight is puzzling. The thoughtful reader can only wonder about the official and underground ethical currents and issues during that central crisis for church and world called the Second World War.

When the author's survey arrives at the life of the church post-1948 he catches his wind in order to provide a full, rather than cursory, review of the Lutheran Church's response to the Communist era. Gluchman reviews the works and positions of contemporary Slovak theologians, especially General Bishop Jan Michalko, Bishop Julius Filo, Sr., Professors Karol Gabris, Karol Nandrasky and Igor Kiss. Gluchman makes clear his disapprobation for the struggles, many of them agonizingly sincere, of theologians and pastors in the 1948-89 era, yet he never satisfactorily analyzes the fundamental conflicts between political context and faithful Christian witness. Thus he gives short shrift to the generation of theologians and pastors who had to forge a faithful witness in the face of a political context which was simultaneously subtle and brutal, discreet and indiscreet, in its attempts to limit, undermine and finally eliminate the church and its ministry. That this did not

occur in the end surely is testimony to a faithfulness in life and witness by the church (of all communions) which is overlooked or belittled by many today.

Gluchman's rather facile statements that light and hope have now finally arrived for the Lutheran Church post-1989 and that its future is therefore bright calls into question his sense of perspective, his appreciation of the ambiguities of history, and the Christian understanding of a God who does not abandon His people, even in the most perilous of times.

Paul Brndjar, ELCA Pastor, Montclair, NJ.

ANNOUNCEMENT

CAREE and NCCC EUROPE MEETING - MARCH 19-20, 2004.

Open invitation to attend the meeting to be held at 475 Riverside Drive, hosted in the meeting rooms of the Reformed Church of America. The Friday program includes reports and analyses by CAREE leaders attending Conference of European Churches (CEC) sessions in Oslo, other travels to Ukraine, Czech Republic, Hungary, Bosnia, Macedonia and Russia. Former dean of the Protestant Theological Faculty in Prague, Dr. Peter Pokorny will address the group. CAREE's annual meeting on Saturday will also include reporting. For details write to Paul Mojzes, President of CAREE, or the Executive Secretary James R. Payton, jr. (caree@redeemer.on.ca)

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