

Author:	Alfonso Riobó Serván
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Review:

One of the most significant projects in the area of confessional law studies in both the Czech and the Slovak Republics, was published in Spain in 2005. Alfonso Riobó Serván, of the State Ecclesiastical Law Institute at the historic Universidad Complutense in Madrid, is closely acquainted with the central European environment. Since his expertise is in the local legal panorama, he possesses an extensive knowledge of the legislation as well as of the original sources. Riobó's work comes as the climax of several years of research, resulting not only in an impressive, systematic work, but also in the overcoming of local barriers through fruitful scientific cooperation. This book provides a complex introduction to the various legal aspects of religious freedom in the Czech and Slovak Republics. Special emphasis is given to the author's view of religious liberty as a fundamental right, praising freedom as a basic value to be respected and guaranteed to churches, religious societies, and individual believers. Moreover, this approach does not consider confessional law and complex configurations between the State and churches only in the light of a formal view on legal norms, without paying due attention to their major function in the service of human rights and social life. The emphasis put on religious liberty provides for a more coherent approach that encompasses state-church relations with respect to all relevant religious entities. The author limits himself to positive legal provisions that comply with the previously mentioned view.

The principal subject of the book is a legal study and analysis. It does not delve into other theoretical and terminological aspects other than those that are required for a precise understanding of the topic. The legal systems of the Czech and Slovak Republics are outlined here in relation to a comprehensive view of confessional law, free of all doubtful simplifications related to historic periods. Serious attention is paid to shared historical events in Czechoslovakia, as well as to the subsequent, and especially the recent legislative position in each of the individual countries. Providing a complex introduction to the confessional legal systems of both republics has proved to be a wise choice, since the history of the legal regulation of religious liberty in the Czech and Slovak Republics naturally comes with plentiful cross-references. Indeed, it is impossible to render an exhaustive account of one without considering the other. The author has managed to provide a

most adequate historical and systematic overview of both of the legal systems, covering both the norms that are partially common as well as those that are entirely different. A considerable portion of the book is dedicated to the period after 1989 which has brought about many significant changes, including the need to adopt a whole series of new legal norms at all levels.

Alfonso Riobó Serván thus not only proves that he is well acquainted with the current legal norms and literature of the given language territory, but also shows solid knowledge in the area of judicature, presenting the most relevant court decisions. It may be justly concluded that the book with its complexity and precision (as it also includes reference to the most relevant legal norms in Spanish) is already finding its place among the most notable works in the area of confessional law studies. The introduction, penned by the Slovak Ambassador to Spain, Ján Voderadský, also refers to the book's significant contribution to mutual understanding between the three countries, Spain and the Czech and Slovak Republics, specifically in the period of the European Union's historic expansion.

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