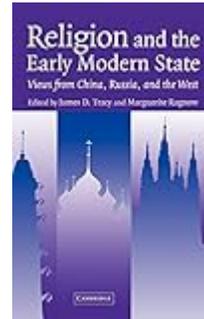




James D. Tracy, Marguerite Rangow, eds. *Religion and the Early Modern State: Views from China, Russia, and the West*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003. x + 415 pp. \$80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-82825-3.



Reviewed by Theo Pronk (Erasmus Center for Early Modern History, Erasmus University Rotterdam)

Published on H-German (January, 2006)

The Interaction of State, the Church, and Popular Belief

From holy wells in Cornwall to China's Eternal Mother all the way back to venerations of Russian local saints and Spanish burial rites, this volume offers a wide-ranging and colorful insight into popular religious perceptions from very different parts of the globe. As reflected in the title, the thirteen chapters of this volume aim to contribute to the ongoing historical debate about the relationship between the early modern state and religion.

As set out in the introduction by Stanford E. Lehmberg and James D. Tracy, the purpose of this volume is to enhance our understanding of how and to what extent early modern governments tried to mold the religious outlooks, identities, and lives of their subjects, by observing the manner in which religious authorities dealt with popular beliefs in times of confessional transitions. Not surprisingly, inseparable concepts such as "confessionalization," "acculturation," or that term so closely connected to early modern state-building, "disciplining," shape the historical background of this volume. Most of these concepts, though, tend toward a "top-down" approach, although a wide consensus of the possibility of

religious reform from below now exists. Indeed, the real contribution of this volume is that through a wide array of examples, it depicts religious reforms as an often complex interplay between "above" and "below." This approach appears most suited to grapple with early modern reality.

In order to create a broad synthesis of the historical interplay between "official" religion and popular belief, the editors have brought together a collection of case studies, some of very comprehensive local character, others with a more extensive scope. Scrutinizing a historical situation and being able to compare it to a larger framework is the objective of this volume. By drawing on very different situations (China, Russia, and Western Europe), this collection of articles is one of a kind and sometimes leads to surprising insights and analogies, which may shed new light on well-known historical topics.

Part 1 of this volume deals with the "top": the different ways in which authorities tried to impose religious reforms or create cultural homogeneity; their reasons; the problems they encountered; and the reactions from "below." Richard Shek examines the fifteenth-

century Chinese movement of the “Eternal Mother,” which was characterized by a strong eschatological orientation. With its repudiation of the worldly order, this movement undermined the Imperial government that based itself on this same order and older religious outlooks. As such, the “Eternal Mother” was considered a menace by authorities throughout China’s early modern period. For his part, Robert O. Crummey examines the Russian church schism and its aftermath. Orthodox church leaders, supporting tsarist policies to maintain (or create) religious conformity, tried to enforce reforms to the detriment of popular belief. Here, Crummey draws a parallel to the confessionalization paradigm. He concludes that the coercive imposition of church reform from “above” was only partly successful, for it provoked resistance among the laity and created different factions within the church itself. In this manner, many aspects of popular belief were able to survive in Russia.

Willem Frijhoff views the other end of the early modern spectrum: the loosely organized Dutch Reformed “public church,” while performing specific public functions, could not claim any exclusive religious authority; no “state church” existed here. As long as people conformed to the general moral and social outlines and as long as piety was guaranteed, coercion to a single confession was not considered necessary. A very long survival of old popular religious traditions was one of the consequences. Frijhoff describes the Dutch situation as “the narrative of group-bound appropriation of the sacred and the group satisfaction of religious demand” (p. 96). Caroline J. Litzenberger uses the example of visitation policies in the bishopric of Gloucester in the second half of the sixteenth century to illustrate that the English Reformation was characterized by a reluctant cooperation between the different layers of religious organization (regional, local, and individual). Because reform policies from above were often ambiguous, the early reformed “state church” showed a great lack of consistency.

Part 2 of the volume focuses on the manner in which (popular) religion sometimes shaped collective group identity that in turn could cause trouble for authorities wanting to implement religious homogeneity. While Richard Shek analyzed Chinese heterodoxy, Romeyn Taylor examines Chinese orthodoxy, which consisted of a hierarchic system comprised of four different religions: official religion, popular religion, Daoism, and Buddhism. The system was further characterized by overlap between different pantheons, so that a static doctrine never emerged. Taylor therefore describes orthodox religion in China rather as a process of mu-

tual accommodation between different religions and between “below” and “above.” Frank E. Sysyn identifies the Ukrainian Khmel’nyts’kyi uprising (1648) against Polish-Lithuanian dominance as the outcome of a popular movement, shaped by Orthodox belief, that was provoked by attempts to enforce (Catholic) religion from above. Again, parallels are drawn with confessionalization. Yet Sysyn also underlines the fact that neither religious reform from above nor the uprising from below were solely motivated by religious differences. Turning to France, Raymond A. Mentzer’s chapter on the Huguenot minority illustrates once again that in spite of social distinctions, religion could create a very strong group identity. According to Mentzer, this group identity was a necessity for the Huguenots to survive within a generally hostile Catholic environment. Another dissenting group, one mainly active within the official church itself, is treated by Paul S. Seaver in his chapter on the English Puritans. Thanks to juridical protection and especially the support it obtained from all levels of society, Puritanism was able to survive the first half of the seventeenth century, despite being considered a threat by the Crown.

Part 3 examines the impact of religious reforms from “above” on (popular) religious perception. It becomes clear that older religious habits often showed great resilience, were just altered superficially or, in some cases, even co-shaped new religious outlooks. Eve Levin illustrates how this pattern applied to Russia. The reforms initiated by the 1721 “Spiritual Regulation,” Peter the Great attempted to modernize and westernize the Orthodox Church and tried to uproot popular religious habits that were considered to be superstitious. Being deeply intertwined with Russian culture, however, most of these habits survived. Susan C. Karant-Nunn argues, on the basis of the German Reformation, that reforms of ritual, such as sermons, were not always perceived by lay people in the way reformers had envisioned them to be understood. While the reformers tried to demystify the sermon and to direct more attention to religious teachings, admonitions, and social discipline, many people continued to think of sermons in the traditional, more magical, and transcendental way. In her article on Counter-Reformation Spain, Sara T. Nalle shows how ecclesiastical policy aimed to impose social discipline through education. A heightened religious awareness would lead to a certain degree of self-correction. According to Nalle, it is possible that older religious perceptions survived these reforms, though that is difficult to prove, because people’s beliefs and their actual utterances could differentiate. Eamon Duffy illustrates how also in Norfolk, Eng-

land, during the Reformation old habits and beliefs languished very slowly and continued to determine communal life at different social levels. Duffy illustrates his case through the example of the interior of the parish church of Salle, which mirrored the persistence of old religious customs. Finally, Nicolas Orme examines the impact of the Reformation in remote Cornwall. Basing his article on documentary sources from the beginning of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Orme concludes that here, too, pre-Reformation beliefs and habits survived for a long period, some of them similar to those in other parts of the kingdom, others deeply rooted in specific Cornish identity.

The chapters in the volume essentially try to answer two questions: the first concerns the relationship between “lived” and “official” religion, while the second concerns the basis of cooperation between state and church authorities. On the basis of these two questions, four general conclusions arise from the diverse contributions to this volume. First, subjects were often reluctant to abandon their religious habits, which, being deeply intertwined with age-old cultural traditions and identities, proved to be very resilient. Second, consensus about policies towards popular belief within the organization of the official church was rare. Third, the repression of popular belief could provoke even stronger feelings of identity that sometimes led to popular uprisings. Finally, the authorities seemed to be aware of the dangers of a blunt enforcement of religious reforms. Taking into account the religious perceptions of the people, old or popular beliefs could therefore, for their part, co-shape “official”

religious outlooks.

In addition to the contribution this volume offers by presenting these conclusions, another positive outcome lies in its wide-ranging geographical approach, containing both local and more broadly focused outlooks. Here it once again becomes clear that, despite certain analogies, political or religious ideas cannot be studied outside of their historical context and, more importantly, without reference to the local environment, the social context, or particular concerns of the moment that are involved.

This last point, however, also reveals the weaker aspect of this volume: the role of the state, its aims, and its means. The majority of the chapters deal solely with the internal relationship between established religions (indeed often supported by secular authorities) and “popular belief,” so that the institutional framework, as well as the interests of the state in a particular moment, are sometimes somewhat underexposed. Religious policies, after all, were rarely solely dictated by the concern of creating religious homogeneity. Examining the motives of the state more thoroughly, though laborious, could have augmented the understanding of the relationships between “above” and “below,” especially since the articles deal with such different institutional backgrounds. To see analogies, then, between Europe (with its considerable internal differences), Russia, and China might be very interesting, but it bears many dangers and it might pose more questions than it gives answers. But then, questioning is the beginning of understanding: a process that this volume initiates.

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Citation: Theo Pronk. Review of Tracy, James D.; Rangow, Marguerite, eds., *Religion and the Early Modern State: Views from China, Russia, and the West*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. January, 2006.

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