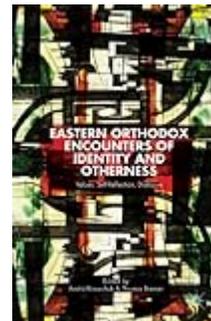




Andrii Krawchuk, Thomas Bremer, eds. *Eastern Orthodox Encounters of Identity and Otherness: Values, Self-Reflection, Dialogue*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 380 pp. \$100.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-137-38284-9.



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Transitional Religion: Orthodox Orientations in a New Europe

Eastern Orthodox Encounters of Identity and Otherness follows a wave of collected volumes on contemporary Eastern Orthodoxy that have appeared in recent years.[1] One might be forgiven for wondering why we need yet another collection of disparate case studies, but these essays focus on a very particular question: How are Eastern Orthodox churches in Eastern Europe, Russia, and Eurasia responding to the challenges of a Western-dominated Europe? Churches from every confession struggled under state socialism. The Orthodox Church, however, had to reconcile the suppression of its priests and religious services, on the one hand, with the special privileges granted it by the state, on the other. Religious power shifted dramatically following the revolutions of 1989 and 1991, and this volume shows that churches are finding it difficult to reposition themselves as one confession among many and to divorce themselves from national(ist) politics. As Andrii Krawchuk notes in his introduction, "Religious life in the region has indeed undergone a fundamental change, but states remain vigilant and reserve the right to intervene at their own discretion.

Increasingly, they view religion as integral to state security, formulating laws and implementing policies that enhance its capacity for social consolidation and prevent its inclination to conflict" (pp. 1&2).

The problem is not just that state socialism collapsed but also that governments in the region must now position themselves vis-à-vis the European Union (EU), with its emphasis on pluralism, liberalism, and transnationalism. Tina Olteanu and Dorothée de Néve note that "the EU influences the religious landscape in member states and candidate countries through the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) as well as through antidiscrimination regulations and the safeguarding of religious pluralism. Beyond that, even Russia, which is neither part of the ENP nor in an accession process to the EU, is challenged by the European norms whenever the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) decides upon alleged violations of Article 9 of the ECHR" (p. 200).[2] The Russian Orthodox Church in particular takes a consistently defensive position toward "European values," questioning the usefulness of a secular legal system that

rejects a *symphonia* (*symphonia*) of church and state. Prominent Orthodox theologians reject Western modernity in both Greece, which is a member state, and Serbia, a candidate country. They argue that Europe puts too much faith in humans, assuming that they are capable of formulating and respecting good laws. By putting humanity, rather than God, at the center of its legal code, Europe quickly slips into idolatry. As Regina Elsner finds in her analysis of official statements of the Moscow Patriarchate since 1991, however, theological elements are fused here almost organically with political and ideological considerations, and discussions of European values are frequently more polemical than theological (p. 173).

Several essays in the volume offer a useful historical perspective, including Ciprian GhiÅa's piece "The Image of the Roman Catholic Church in the Orthodox Press of Romania, 1918-1940." As GhiÅa points out, the Romanian Orthodox Church positioned itself in opposition to Western Christianity in the seventeenth century, and for various historically contingent reasons has continued to perceive Roman and Greek Catholicism as a threat ever since. Contemporary fears about the imperialism of Western Christianity are grounded in older debates over Slavophilism and Westernization, papal primacy, proselytism, and Enlightenment rationality. Similarly, Orthodox thinkers are now using centuries-old theological arguments that construct Orthodoxy as a defensive bastion of Truth against schismatics and heretics to oppose Islamic attempts to find common ground with Christians. When Muslim leaders issued the open letter "A Common Word between Us and You" in 2007, Orthodox leaders responded by identifying theological presuppositions that they believed make interfaith dialogue impossible.[3]

Only a handful of essays approach questions of Otherness and dialogue from a theological perspective, and these are the most optimistic of the volume. Matthew Baker notes that Georges Florovsky's influential neo-Patristic synthesis emerged out of creative dialogue with Western Christians. Christoph MÅ¼hl points out that ecumenical discussions that took place over five decades between Russian Orthodox and German Protestant leaders over the doctrine of justification made significant progress before Orthodox leaders broke off dialogue in 2009 on the grounds that the new chair of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany was a woman. As Dagmar Heller explores in detail, such practical issues as women's ordination, homosexuality, human rights, common prayer, and proselytism divide Christians more than core theological disagreements.

One of the key lessons from this volume is that

geopolitical change poses serious challenges for religious leaders because the churches have developed symbiotically with the political and cultural structures of their societies. The establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate in the nineteenth century, for instance, was instrumental in establishing an independent Bulgarian nation-state, which makes it particularly difficult for the Bulgarian state to embrace religious pluralism. Similarly, tensions in Ukraine between the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, and the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church reflect regional identities inside Ukraine and nationalist claims about Russian influence that go far beyond differences in religious beliefs or practices. The complex reality of Eastern Orthodox encounters of identity and otherness are regionally specific, politically and theologically conditioned, and impossible to generalize. This volume struggles to present a comprehensive analysis of this reality even in twenty-one essays on a wide variety of topics. We can only look forward to more such collections in the future.

Notes

[1]. See Bruce Berglund and Brian Porter-Szucs, eds., *Christianity and Modernity in Eastern Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010); Christine Chaillot, ed., *The Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011); and Alfons BrÅ¼ning and Evert van der Zweerde, eds., *Orthodox Christianity and Human Rights* (Leuven: Peeters, 2012).

[2]. Article 9 of the ECHR states that "1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance. 2. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others." See European Court of Human Rights, Council of Europe, *European Convention on Human Rights*, 10-11, http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_ENG.pdf.

[3]. A Common Word, "The ACW Letter: A Common Word between US and You," <http://www.acommonword.com/the-acw-document/>.

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