**BOOK REVIEW**

***Orthodox Christian Renewal Movements in Eastern Europe***

**edited by Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović and Radmila Radić**

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Eastern Orthodox Christianity prides itself on following Tradition, on preserving the authentic faith of the Apostles, but that does not mean that nothing has changed in the past two thousand years. What it does mean is that change was frequently contested. Tradition does and must adapt to the times, but it is interpreted by the Church as a whole; no one person has the authority to innovate on their own initiative. During the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries this paradox – that Tradition must adapt yet no-one may adapt it – caused repeated tensions within the Orthodox churches of Eastern Europe. This volume explores ten different renewal movements that emerged across the region during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Individual chapters focus on specific movements, with five chapters dedicated to the God Worshippers (Serbia) and two to the Lord’s Army (Romania and Serbia). Two synthetic chapters discuss the phenomenon as a whole. The first, by Meic Pearse, provides the historical context of modernization and nation-building in which these movements appeared, arguing that they were a result of Orthodoxy’s encounter with modernity. The second, an Introduction written by Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović and Radmila Radić, notes the remarkable paucity of research on renewal within Orthodoxy and argues that in addition to helping us understand religion better, elucidating these movements contextualizes “the social role of Church institutions, social welfare, experiences of modernity and patterns of social developments.” (17) Unfortunately, neither of these chapters offer much in terms of general analysis of causes, character, or consequences. Individual chapters do engage with some of these questions, but most are more descriptive than analytical and spend little time on historiographical debates. Discussing some of these movements for first time in scholarly literature, the volume as a whole throws up more questions than answers.

Many of the groups discussed here had a decisively evangelical flavour. As Milovanović and Radić tell us in the Introduction, they “were all characterized with intensity of personal religious experience, holiness, discipline, communion, Scriptural authority, use of vernacular languages in liturgical practice, hymn chanting, prayer, revival of pilgrimages and monasticism.” (12) In some cases renewal movements seem to have emerged completely independently of Western influences. Ioann Verkhovskii, for example, developed a new form of Old Belief in late imperial Russia by blending nationalism, Slavophilism, and democratic forms of church governance. Other groups, such as the Renovationists used a passing acquaintance with Western liberalism to formulate focused critiques of the bureacratization of the Russian Orthodox Church and its subservient relationship to the state. Not a Western import, their religious reforms nonetheless reflected certain Western Protestant discourses and values that were circulating in certain educated circles within St Petersburg and Moscow. Count Lev Tolstoy explicitly founded his sect in conversation with both Western Christianity and Orthodoxy, and evangelical peasant groups such as the Stundists and the Molokans were influenced by Protestant German settlers. These groups developed within an Orthodox milieu, however, and reacted to local pressures. During the 1890s Tolstoyans attempted to influence the evangelicals, hoping to extend Tolstoyism out of elite circles and to add the support of educated society to these predominantely peasant Christianites. Tolstoy and his followers had a degree of success with the Doukhobors in southern Caucasia, who refused to bear arms or swear an oath to the tsar. The government responded by exiling over a thousand people, many of whom died on their way to Siberia. In Kiev province, Kondrat Maliovannyi led a reform movement within Stundo-Baptism characterised by ecstatic prayer, dancing and singing, and a belief that Maliovannyi was the Son of God returned to herald the Last Judgement. All of these movements were hostile to the Russian state and the official church, though some were more willing to work with it than others. Those which, like the Doukhobors, explicitly rejected state authority, were quickly suppressed with lethal force. In Russia it was only Verkhovskii’s followers and the Renovationists who even tried to renew Orthodoxy – all the others preferred absolute separation from the rest of the church. The Russian case studies also reflect clear differences between educated and popular religion. Whereas Verkhovksii, Tolstoy, and the Renovationists articulated their beliefs first and foremost through letters and pamphlets, the Doukhobors and the Maliovantsy relied on face-to-face gatherings and local preachers, reflecting a more evangelical approach to spirituality and organization.

Practices usually associated with Protestant evangelicalism arrived in the rest of Eastern Europe through a variety of avenues. The Nazarenes, for example, spread out from Switzerland during the 1830s, making converts in Hungary and the Serbian Banat. Serbian Orthodox leaders became increasingly concerned that Nazarenes were converting Orthodox believers in the 1870s, and Boris Aleksov argues that Orthodox reforms such as regular preaching were a response to Nazarene influence. In particular, he claims that the God Worshippers, a grassroots movement emphasizing individual piety and holiness, learned to read the Bible from the Nazarenes, making devotional Bible reading a core element of God Worshipping. Radić and Milovanović repeat this assertion, noting that the God Worshipper movement emerged out of a disparate collection of small devotional groups influenced by different Protestant sects, most notably the Nazarenes. Dragan Ašković’s study of God Worshipper hymnbooks and singing, however, reminds us that they also drew deeply on folk traditions and lyric forms in their gatherings. The movement became more institutionalized after the First World War, responding to state pressure for an organizational structure that bureaucrats could understand and interact with. The need for devotional tracts exposed them to evangelical Protestant influences during the interwar period, but many God Worshippers also entered Orthodox monasteries, invigorating Serbian monasticism rather than encouraging religious irredentism. Similarly, Ksenija Končarević maintains that the Serbian Orthodox Church modernized its liturgical language as a direct response to the popularity of the devotional practices encouraged by the God Worshippers.

Theoretical debates over religious influences are mostly absent from this volume. The authors assume that contemporaneity is enough to demonstrate influence, and downplay the impact of Roman Catholic practices or spreading literacy in order to focus on more colourful groups such as the Nazarenes and the God Worshippers. In most cases these chapters are convincing when they say that Orthodox leaders were deeply concerned with the implications of grassroots renewal movements for the future of their church, but whether they imitated them is a different question. Dragana Radisavljević-Ćiparizović’s much more theoretically-informed chapter on twenty-first century renewal movements in Serbian Orthodox communities makes one wonder how conscious and coordinated religious change was. She concludes that much more local factors are at work today than historians assume gave birth to earlier movements such as the God Worshippers, a claim that should give pause to our confidence about religious change in the early twentieth century too.

The two chapters on the Lord’s Army movement in Romania make another interesting contrast. Corneliu Constantineanu argues that this renewal movement emerged from “the ‘rediscovery’ of Scripture at the beginning of the twentieth century,” (231) which he locates in Dumitru Cornilescu’s translation of the Bible, published in stages between 1921 and 1924, in Teodor Popescu’s preaching in Bucharest, and in Iosif Trifa’s newspaper in Sibiu, first published in 1922. The Lord’s Army took root among Trifa’s readers in Transylvania, and although Trifa was aware of what Cornliescu and Popescu were preaching in Bucharest, his was a completely independent renewal project. The Romanian Orthodox Church functions as a monolithic actor in Constantineanu’s account, opposing the renewal efforts of Cornilescu, Popescu, and Trifa, and refusing even to dialogue with them. Mircea Măran’s chapter, on the other hand, situates the emergence of the Lord’s Army within “the wish to strengthen Orthodox elite influence in the multi-ethnic and multiconfessional society of Transylvania and to attempt to suppress the neo-Protestant movements which were seriously threatening to convert a large number of Romanian Orthodox believers.” (266) He focuses predominantely on the Serbian Banat, and is able to show how the Lord’s Army functioned to strengthen ethnic and religious identities at the same time that it promoted a specific type of spirituality. Rather than emphasizing the differences between the Lord’s Army and the official Orthodox Church, Măran shows how and why the Church was worked together in specific times and places.

Although it only receives one chapter, the Zoe Brotherhood is probably the best known of the renewal movements discussed in this volume. A number of commentators have accused Zoe of being too “Protestant”, most notably the theologian Hristos Yannaras, who spent several years in the movement as a young man. In this chapter Amaryllis Logotheti argues that Zoe was “a reorganisation of the sovereign discourse of the Church as the preferential ally of the state within the borrowed version of the Protestant example.” (290) Logotheti’s nuanced approach to Zoe goals suggests a useful way of understanding many of the Orthodox renewal movements discussed here. Not Protestant, neither were they completely Orthodox in their ecclesiology and practice. The influence of Western Protestantism on these movements is undeniable, but it often arrived in oblique ways and was instrumentalized by local religious actors for their own purposes. Galina Goncharova’s chapter on the White Cross stavropegial monastic fraternity in Bulgaria shows how renewal movements that were able to negotiate church politics and align them with ecclesiastic and national goals functioned. There was no talk of Protestantism here, although the discourse and values of the fraternity were remarkably similar to those of other renewal movements. It is possible that Orthodox renewal only became “Protestant” when its enemies had something to gain from the label. The same global religious currents and broad social trends intersected to produce all of the movements discussed in this volume, but how their stories played out depended on local conditions and, often, petty politics.

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