

Jennifer Jean Wynot. *Keeping the Faith: Russian Orthodox Monasticism in the Soviet Union, 1917-1939*. College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2004. Pages i-xiii; 1-235; glossary, bibliography, index. *Reviewed by Walter D. Ray*

Monasticism is the vanguard of the Eastern Christian people. Despite efforts over the centuries to domesticate it and subject it to institutional control, both governmental and ecclesiastical, Eastern Christian monasticism has managed to retain at least some of its original character as a spontaneous movement of Christians seeking to live a radical commitment to the Gospel. Throughout its history it has remained largely a lay movement and close to the laity, a source of inspiration, guidance and spiritual power. Lenin and Stalin understood this and the power of vanguards, and in their desire to eradicate religion in their Soviet state sought to destroy Russian monasticism. They failed. Jennifer Jean Wynot gives us a kind of tactical history of the Bolshevik war on monasticism, from Lenin's 1917 decree on land nationalization through Stalin's purges, chronicling the Soviet attacks and monastic responses.

Wynot sets the stage in chapter one with a succinct overview of the history of monasticism in its Eastern, particularly Russian, form up to the eve of the Bolshevik revolution, focusing on the various reforming movements of the preceding two centuries. Understanding these reform movements is necessary for understanding the resilience of Russian monasticism in the trials that would follow. Especially important was the spiritual revival begun in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century with the translation into Slavonic by Paisy Velichkovsky of the *Philokalia*, an anthology of patristic writings on prayer of the heart. This work inspired a monastic revival epitomized in the famous *starsy* (elders) of the Optina Pustin' monastery who served as spiritual directors to common folk and intellectuals alike, including Gogol, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. Figures cited by Wynot show the extent of this monastic revival. From the time of Catherine the Great (1762-1796), whose expropriation of Church lands had halved the number of monasteries in Russia, to the eve of the revolution, the number of monasteries (both men's and women's) increased from 385 to 1242. This revival in monasticism was accompanied by a revival in the church as a whole culminating in the All Russian Church Council of 1917, which restored the Patriarchate, suppressed in 1721 by Peter the Great.

Wynot divides the main part of her study into four periods, each of which gets a chapter: the Bolshevik revolution, civil war and the subsequent famine (1917-1922); the New Economic Policy (NEP) period (1921-1928); collectivization and its famine, which Wynot titles "The Good Friday of Russian Monasticism," a reference to the mass arrests of monastics on February 18, 1932 (1928-1934); and what Wynot calls "The Descent into Hell," a period that begins with relative calm and descends into Stalin's purges (1934-1939). The last division, though often made in scholarship, is, as Wynot acknowledges, perhaps more illusory than real. The calm following collectivization represented more a pause in the persecution than a change in policy. The NEP years do stand out as a distinct period characterized by a clear change in tactics in the war with religion in general. For monasticism, however, the situation worsened during this period. Monastery closures continued apace; all monasteries on Soviet territory were closed by 1930. Monasteries lost even the breathing space they had managed to make for themselves in the previous period by getting themselves declared *kolkhozy* (collective farms) or *sovkhozy* (state-owned farms).

In line with a number of other recent studies, Wynot finds that in the immediate post-revolution period the approach to monasticism was neither monolithic nor universal. While

the Bolsheviks shared an antipathy toward religion, they were not united in their approach to its eradication. An active conversation was taking place within the party. “Soft-liners” such as Lunacharski preferred cooption and education, the approach that would be taken during NEP, while “hard-liners” like Lenin favored more drastic measures. Wynot makes a significant contribution by documenting these sometimes public disagreements from the archives of the Russian Federation and two regions, Moscow and Smolensk. While the party quickly pushed through decrees on land nationalization (Nov. 8, 1917) and separation of church and state (Jan. 23, 1918), both of which adversely affected the monasteries, their implementation was far from uniform, especially in areas far away from the center of power. Village soviets would sometimes protect their churches and monasteries. Still, we should not overstate the ineffectiveness of the Bolsheviks. In their first two years in power they managed to close 673 monasteries, over half of the monasteries in existence on the eve of the revolution, even while fighting a civil war.

The archival documentation that enriches the first part of Wynot’s study dries up after NEP. There is a lack of information, for example, about the process that led to the mass arrests, imprisonments and executions of monastics that began on February 18, 1932, the “Good Friday of Russian Monasticism.” An absence of discussion within the Party is understandable as power became concentrated in the hands of Stalin. But there must have been orders, reports and other records of the execution of the tyrant’s designs. If they still exist, they are to be found in the archives of the state security apparatus, the OGPU and its successor, the KGB. Wynot cannot be faulted with this lack of documentation, since these archives are not yet open to general research. But her efforts to fill the gap are not convincing. To attribute this comprehensive attempt to wipe out Russian monasticism to the 1932 five-year plan of the League of the Militant Godless or the famine caused by Stalin’s dekulakization is woefully inadequate. The monastics swept up in these arrests were not convenient scapegoats, but victims of a renewed, systematic attack on monasticism that began as early as 1928 with Stalin’s consolidation of power. Nor should this attack be seen as simply ancillary to collectivization any more than the intensified persecution at the end of the 1930s should be seen as ancillary to the purges. To be fair, Wynot’s focus is not Soviet decision-making but the response of monastics to the climate created by Soviet decisions. Nevertheless, a more fulsome account of that climate of threat and fear would help the reader better appreciate the enormity of what the monastics were facing.

Wynot’s principle goal, she says, is “to examine ways in which monks and nuns were able to preserve their way of life despite hardship” (x). In this she has succeeded admirably, for each period cataloging the range of tactics employed by monastics in response to Soviet power. In the early periods this is accomplished partly through a mirror reading of the archived Party documents showing the authorities’ responses to monastic moves. Particularly interesting were the attempts by monastics to accommodate themselves to Soviet power by turning themselves into Soviet collective farms. Wynot is right to defend these monasteries from charges of collaboration. They were, after all, trying to maintain their own identity within the system in a way which seemed natural; a communal way of life is part of the definition of monasticism. In their appeals to have this way of life recognized as manifesting the Communist ideal they were only acting like the Christian woman described by Solzhenitsyn in his *Gulag Archipelago*, who when being interrogated by the NKVD (another predecessor to the KGB), protested that Christians are the best citizens, always seeking to obey the law and praying for the well-being of the rulers. This is nothing more or less than the second-century apologists did at another moment of persecution. Any gains the

monasteries made in this direction, however, were wiped out during NEP and especially during Stalin's collectivization.

Once all the monasteries were closed and monastics were being rounded up, imprisoned and executed, the only response was to go underground. Secret monasteries were formed in forests or cities, or in the Gulag. Many monks and nuns lived as hermits or lived double lives as secret monastics "in the world," whether officially tonsured or not. One such nun interviewed by the author, Mother Serafima, a medical doctor and, from 1922, a nun, was directed by her spiritual father, a bishop, never to tell anyone about her monastic life. She kept the secret to herself, calling it "her deepest happiness" (133). A number of memoirs of such monastics have appeared since the fall of the Soviet Union. Wynot has done the non-Russian speaking reader a great favor by bringing many of their stories to us. This evidence can only be anecdotal, of course, and we will probably never know the breadth of Russian monasticism during this period. Nevertheless, the number of stories that have appeared give a sense of monasticism's continued importance for the Russian Church.

Wynot has provided us with a concise, highly readable overview of an important period in the history of Russian monasticism. The catalogue she presents of monastic responses to Soviet pressure should be a starting point for further research. From her account it becomes clear that the Bolsheviks could not win their war with monasticism and with Orthodoxy. Persecution brought monasticism closer to the ordinary faithful and strengthened the traditional bonds between them. The exercise of *starchestvo*, monastic spiritual direction, continued to play a significant role in the Church. As Wynot reports, there were several important elders, particularly women elders, such as Mother Agna, a former abbess, who lived in a forest in central Russia. "Though she lived in hiding, those Orthodox who were searching for spiritual guidance knew where to find her" (159). Under pressure, monasticism returned to its roots where it is not an institution but a charismatic movement that defies all establishments. The tradition of monasticism provided a way of living a radical Christian commitment that could subvert the reality the Bolsheviks were trying to create.

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Silvio Ferrari and W. Cole Durham (eds.) *Law and Religion in Post-Communist Europe* (Leuven: Peeters 2003). 427pp.. *Reviewed by Johan D. van der Vyver.*

The radical political transition of Eastern European countries from communism to a more or less democratic dispensation has had an influence on almost every aspect of social structures within the newly emancipated states, and on the personal lives of peoples belonging to those communities. Modalities of human existence associated with religious institutions, confessional commitments, and a religiously-based moral life style, are no exceptions in this regard. Describing the relationships between law and religion within altogether sixteen Eastern European states, written in each instance by a distinguished expert on religious freedom from the state concerned, is the focus of the volume under review.

Putting together an anthology on the laws and practices relating to the symbiosis of law and religion in different countries written by a distinct expert from each country being surveyed has its advantages. It is hardly possible for a single author to have the in-depth knowledge of the laws and practices of all the countries being included in the survey. Here, the reader is given the benefit of analyses by persons who not only derive their knowledge from academic study and discourse, but who are also on the spot, and who through their empirical exposure to the system and its manifestations are best equipped to provide a reliable *contemporaneo exposito*.

But following this method may also have its shortcomings. Each person has a certain slant to his or her interests and understanding and could therefore contribute to an admittedly colorful quilt, but one that lacks a coherent pattern or central consistency. Too many cooks could also make a truly comparative perception of the central theme quite impossible.

The editors of *Law and Religion in Post-Communist Europe* avoided a patchwork conglomeration by selecting their authors from among the best; and perhaps more importantly, by instructing the authors to deal with the same set of pertinent questions: describe the social dimensions and historical setting of law and religion in your country, the legal sources relevant to the subject-matter of the anthology, the legal status of religious institutions/communities, labor law affecting the churches, the financing of religious institutions, assistance afforded to religion in public institutions, the legal status of priests and members of religious orders, the impact of religion in matrimonial affairs and in family law, religion in education, and the rules of criminal law relating to religion. These are recurring themes in almost all the chapters of the book. Some authors did not afford a distinct place to all of these themes in a main paragraph, combining several of them under a more general heading, or not dealing with one or more of them at all. The legal status of the clergy and religious orders (erroneously referred to in the piece on Albania as the “religious” status of priests and members of religious orders), for example, is neglected in the chapters on Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, and Poland, criminal sanctions pertinent to freedom of religion or belief is not specifically dealt with in the case of Estonia, Latvia, and Poland. This could perhaps be explained on the basis that these subject-matters are not particularly significant in the countries concerned, or have not attracted special regulation in those countries.

Religion and the media might also have been among the topics authors were asked to deal with, but the media only received special mention in the chapters on Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, and Latvia. Some authors have added somewhat isolated subject-matters to the ones dealt with by most, for example a paragraph on churches and culture (Albania, the Czech Republic and Macedonia), the problem of conscientious objections (Bulgaria), church-state relations (Estonia, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, and Ukraine), and (most usefully) a section on “key issues”, “main features”, or “basic

characteristics” of the system (Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia).

It is in a sense unfortunate that some authors did not follow the sequence and exact sub-titles of the subject-matters which they were instructed to cover. This makes comparative research from the volume somewhat more complicated. It even in some instances entail inaccuracies. For example, Evis Karandrea, writing on *Church and State in Albania*, has included in the survey a paragraph on “The Right to Self-Determination of Churches and Religious Communities in Internal Affairs”. The right to self-determination as defined in international human rights law does belong to religious communities (people united by a common confession) but not to religious institutions (a church as a structural social entity). The right to self-determination demands of the state to permit religious communities to profess and to practice their faith. The competence of a church institution to conduct its own internal affairs and organize its domestic governmental design without state interference is a matter of church autonomy and not of self-determination.

There are two country-specific chapters that do not follow the methodological design that is more or less current in all the others. The one analyzes “Church and State in the East German Länder of the Former German Democratic Republic.” The problems facing regions of the former German Democratic Republic are indeed quite different from those experienced by the other Eastern European states—if for no other reason, then simply because upon unification of East and West Germany in 1990, the German Basic Law was made applicable to the entire country. It was therefore more a question of the East German Länder having to come to terms with existing constitutional decrees and legal arrangements of church-state and freedom of religion matters. An overview by Axel Frhr von Campenhausen of the trials and tribulations that attended the unification process represents a most insightful addendum to the chapters on Eastern European countries properly so-called.

The other country-specific chapter that seems to be at odds, is one by Vsevolod Chaplin dealing essentially with the Russian Law of 1997 *On the Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations* from the perspective of the Russian Orthodox Church (a preceding chapter by Lev Simkin deals with “Church and State in Russia” in accordance with the general methodological design of the volume). The chapter by Chaplin may be defined as an apology for the 1997 Law. It is informative, but also designed to show that the Law “has not resulted in mass discrimination against religious minorities, as some critics of the Law predicted to try to frighten us” (at 283). Chaplin reduces the disputes that erupted in religious circles when the 1997 Law replaced the Law of 1990 *On the Freedom of Faiths* to a prevailing dichotomy between the “Westernizers” and “Slavophiles”. The “Westernizers” can perhaps more accurately be defined as those who attempted to impose upon, or import into, Eastern European countries the typical American perception of religious freedom (the separation of church and state is not a typical Western or European institution), while the “Slavonites”, according to Chaplin, are those who “in religious and social thinking ... perceive the church body, society, and the state as a single whole” (at 286). The problems experienced in Russia with the Law of 1990 derived precisely from the fact that its drafters sought to impose the American model on a community with a totally different political and cultural mind-set. In reaction—in this reviewer’s opinion—the 1997 Law went somewhat overboard by unduly restricting the religious rights of denominations that lacked the 15 years tenure in Russia, which has been stipulated in the Law as the divide between the (privileged) “religious organizations” and the (disadvantaged) “religious groups”—and in response to Chaplin, it might be noted that the disadvantages of the latter group stipulated in Article 27.3 of the 1997 Law go well beyond concerns of affording tax exemptions to those institutions

that have not yet “proved their viability by fifteen years of existence” (at 283). It must be conceded, though, that the Russian authorities have applied the law with circumspection and without “mass discrimination against religious minorities” (at 283).

I have singled out the chapter by Vsevolod Chaplin for special scrutiny in order to make a point that could perhaps best be highlighted through a personal anecdote. A few years ago, I was invited to participate in a dialogue with a group of Chinese Christians who were seeking assistance and advice on the drafting of a law on religious freedom for China. Shortly before that time, China had signed (not ratified) the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and our Chinese friends thought this was an opportune moment to come forward with a law on religious freedom. My advice, in a nut shell, was not to carbon copy the American model of religious freedom; that would be too much freedom too soon. If you are looking for a precedent to follow, go to Eastern European countries in transition that have avoided a leap from the one extreme to the other. I specially commended the Polish Law of 17 May 1989 *On Guarantees of Freedom of Conscience and Belief*—and just for the record, the (American) sponsors of our discussions presumably did not care for my advice, because I was not invited to participate in subsequent meetings with the Chinese group.

The point is—and this is borne out by the Russian experience—that the transition from a totalitarian regime, to be practical, must for at least an interim period retain some state control of religious activities and institutions. Attempts in Bulgaria to replace the Religious Denominations Act of 1949 with one that would guarantee freedom of religion in accordance with the Constitution of 1991 (which according to Jenia Peteva upholds the fundamentals of religious pluralism, separation between religion and state, autonomy of religious denominations and non-discrimination (at 39)), has been unsuccessful thus far, due probably to the ongoing rivalries between the Bulgarian brand of “Westernizers” and “Slavonites”.

The Polish Law held out here as a model for countries in transition from totalitarian state control of, and interference in, matters of religion is from a radical religious freedom perspective quite censurable. It contains a long list of competencies *afforded by the state* to citizens as components of the freedom of conscience and belief (art. 2): the right to create churches and other religious unions and to belong or not to belong to them; to participate in religious functions and services, fulfill religious duties, and observe religious holidays; to profess one’s religion or convictions; to bring up one’s children according to one’s religious convictions; not to profess one’s religion or belief; to maintain contact with other persons of one’s faith and to participate in international religious organizations; to utilize information sources in matters of religion; to produce, to purchase, and to make use of objects required for religious cult purposes and religious practices; to produce, purchase and possess articles required for observing religious rites; to choose a clerical or monastic order; to establish lay organizations with a view to realizing objectives of a professed religion or conviction. Poland established, as part of the state administration, the Office of Denominational Affairs as a link, on the political front, between church and state (art. 15(1)). The creation of a church or other religious union in Poland is effected through registration of the institution with the Office of Denominational Affairs (art. 30), supported by at least fifteen Polish citizens (art. 31), and including in the application all kinds of information, such as details of the “basic doctrinal assumptions” of the concerned faith (art. 32(1)(a)) and the applicant’s statute (containing details—insisted upon by the state—of, inter alia, its aims and proposed activities, sources of financing and the like) (art. 32(2)). Church officials are required by law to notify the appropriate organ of state about the creation, change of name, seat, borders, or merger, division and annulment of a diocese or parish (art. 14(1)). The state wants to know about the appointment or removal from office of the executive organ of a church or other

religious institution (art. 14(2)). The Head of the Office of Denominational Affairs may “express reservations” in regard to the appointment of a foreigner as a responsible church official entrusted with the duty of notifying the state of the above information and eventualities (art. 14(4)). Even in countries experiencing radical change from state control over religion and religious institutions, some form of control seems necessary during the period of transition and even thereafter.

The book contains two further chapters, right at the beginning one by Giovanni Barberini and at the end one by Silvio Ferrari. Both of these chapters give an overview of law and religion issues experienced by Eastern European states in transition and provide excellent synopses of the over all theme of the book, and the problems facing those states in coming to terms with the new dispensation. They also contain summaries of states upholding doctrines such as the separation of church and state, preferential treatment of a particular religion, registration of religious institutions, agreements concluded with the Holy See, and the like.

Reading through the pages of *Law and Religion in Post-Communist Europe*, one is again struck by the many problems confronting those striving toward a better future under the norms of good governance. Silvio Ferrari speaks of “A Lost Opportunity?”, noting that “the legal systems of the post-Communist countries ... merely offer a replica – and sometimes, in terms of the freedom and equality of religious groups, it is a deficient one – of the solutions (which are already in need of reform) adopted in the Western countries” (at 422-23).

In a preface, the editors promised a follow-up volume in which the laws governing the relationship between church and state in the same Eastern European countries covered in the current volume is to be recorded and analyzed. I have been informed that *Laws on Religion and the State in Post-Communist Europe* (eds. W. Cole Durham & Silvio Ferrari) has recently been published by Peeters Publishers.

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