

RELIGION AND THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF EASTERN EUROPE

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For the last several years, historiography¹ on Eastern Europe has been at sea, in rough and uncharted waters. The unanticipated collapse of the Iron Curtain in 1989, followed by the startling 1991 dismemberment of the Soviet Union, threw the scholarly study of the history of Eastern Europe into considerable chaos. Most of what had seemed so important suddenly became widely irrelevant. Because of all this, the historiography on Eastern Europe must change. I have dealt elsewhere with certain facets of this problem²; in this treatment, I will urge that the role of religion--which has been almost entirely neglected as a factor in the history of Eastern Europe--must receive much more careful consideration and knowledgeable presentation in future historiography on Eastern Europe. Before treating that question, though, we need to see more fully why change in the historiography is necessary.

The Necessity of Change

The reason the historiography must change is simple. The fledgling discipline of Eastern European history burst upon the academic scene after World War II--suspiciously, just in time to be serviceable to the powers that be during the Cold War. While we historians might prefer to claim that disinterested scholarship, rather than political or economic agendas, drove that development, the record of Eastern European historiography over its brief existence to 1989 witnesses against us: the overwhelming proportion of the works produced during that time focused on the period of Communist

¹My treatment will concentrate on the historiography on Eastern Europe produced in the western world--i.e., Western Europe and North America; it will not include assessment of the historical studies produced within Eastern Europe itself. To limit the treatment within manageable bounds, I will limit my comments to works written in English; however, the same criticisms are valid for studies produced in other western languages.

²See my "Revisioning the Historiography of Eastern Europe," *Fides et Historia* 31 (1999):77-90; cf. also my "Bypassing the History of Eastern Europe: A Failure of Twentieth-Century Christian Scholarship," *Christian Scholar's Review* 29 (2000):713-730.

domination. To be sure, this historiography unquestionably advanced knowledge about the history of Eastern Europe for that half-century, and one must not overlook the valuable contributions thus produced. However, it takes little sympathetic imagination to appreciate that this fixation has hardly led to significant understanding of the history of Eastern Europe itself, its peoples, its nations, and their interactions. Now free of Communist Russian overlordship (if not yet of its lingering effects), Eastern Europe requires treatment in its own right, as a region of the world with a long, complicated, and fascinating history--a history stretching back far before Communism was ever spawned or Russia had even emerged as a state.

While change can be no less disorienting for scholars than for anyone else, historians of the region should welcome the present situation: this is a challenging and exciting time to live and labor as a historian of Eastern Europe! How rare it is to see nations being (re-)born and taking their first awkward steps into an uncertain future! Historians of Eastern Europe have the opportunity to observe, reflect on, and teach about current events in light of what has transpired in each country's past, helping western students make some sense of what is undeniably an unusual historical confluence.

In some academic circles, though, the end of the Cold War has not issued into such openness; rather, it has removed the rationale for departments of Eastern European studies. A colleague in a British university has advised me that some universities in the United Kingdom are phasing out their programs, given the change in political climate. Whatever economic justification might be offered for such a move, this can only be regretted. For one thing, it is politically unwise: it does nothing to indicate that people in Britain have a different attitude now toward the peoples of Eastern Europe than Chamberlain evidenced in his regrettable comments about Czechoslovakia after the 1938 Munich Pact. From an academic perspective, this move shows scant concern for genuine understanding of the region, the peoples who inhabit it, or the nations now struggling within it.

Instead of backing away from Eastern European studies or trying to avoid ineluctable change, the historiography of Eastern Europe needs to reorient itself to its task. As I have argued elsewhere, the full history must receive coverage in that historiography (and not just the last 3.38% of it, as has been the case with the post-World

War II fixation), and historical treatments need to offer synthetic presentations showing the patterns which have marked the history of Eastern Europe in its distinctive epochs.³ Another element that must change in the historiography is its neglect of religion as a formative influence on the history of Eastern Europe.

The Neglect of Religion

As one surveys the historiography of Eastern Europe, one rarely encounters significant consideration of the role of religion in and throughout the region. From my assessment, there seem to be two main reasons for this omission. One of them has to do with the recent Communist past of Eastern Europe; the other reflects contemporary scholarly approaches in the west.

The U.S.S.R. tightly controlled Eastern Europe in the period since World War II, and this is the period that has been treated in most of the available studies generated by historiography on the region. Atheistic in ideology, Soviet Communism vigorously persecuted and in other ways sought to undermine religion, both in Russia itself and in its Eastern European satellites. Consequently, it might be argued that it is not particularly surprising that religion has not played an important role in that historiography.

However, this justification of the *status questionis* betrays a flawed conception of what historiography on Eastern Europe ought to be, since it focuses on the Russian Communist overlords rather than on the peoples of Eastern Europe themselves. Historiography on Eastern Europe needs to deal with the peoples and nations of Eastern Europe as they are and have been, and not as the straitjacketed underlings of their Soviet masters. Various national histories have shown that the respective peoples of Eastern Europe have deep religious roots which have not been killed by Soviet Communism's atheistic herbicides. Indeed, the Communist rulers in several of the Eastern European nations discovered, much to their surprise and chagrin, that Communist ideology and power could not get the peoples of Eastern Europe to foreswear their longstanding religious commitments. Not only did the various churches survive the period of Communist repression; as events since 1989 have shown, religion continues to be a

³See my "Revisioning the Historiography of Eastern Europe," pp. 81-85 and 85-87, respectively.

motive force among the peoples of Eastern Europe.

Thus, the failure of historiography on Eastern Europe to treat religion as an influential factor in Eastern European history indicates greater deference to Communist predilections than awareness of Eastern European attitudes. There is delicious scholarly irony in this: given the undeniable politicization of Eastern European studies since World War II, it is striking that western historians evidently turned out to be more complaisant students of the Communist Russian line on this than did the peoples of Eastern Europe. No longer can historiography on Eastern Europe excuse its neglect of religion as a formative influence in the region by pointing at Communist ideology. In Eastern Europe, Communism is gone, but religion remains. Historiography needs to deal with the history of Eastern Europe in ways that show why and how religion has been and continues to be a significant influence in the region.

A second reason for the neglect of religion as an influence in Eastern European historiography arises from a western habit of mind. The peoples and nations of Eastern Europe have lived by an attitude which the countries of the west have, to a large degree, rejected--namely, that religion can play a significant and shaping role in public life. For the historiography on Eastern Europe to proffer bona fide understanding of Eastern Europe, as opposed to projecting western attitudes upon the peoples and nations of the area, western scholars will need to be alert to this significant cultural difference from the west.

For a variety of reasons, the cultures of Western Europe and North America have opted for a separation of religion from public life. For the most part, while individuals in the west are welcome to practice religion or hold religious convictions, those individuals are expected to relegate such practices and convictions to the private sphere of life. For matters of the public square, religion has become an unwelcome intruder. Virtually all the nations of the west have adopted one or another form of this basic attitude, enshrining it in constitutional documents or in juridical decisions.

A peculiar evolution of this perspective has occurred in western academe: embraced as a basic assumption for society, the separation of religion from public life has, for many western scholars, been transmogrified into historiographical presupposition. That is, the *social convention* has been uncritically accepted as a

historiographical canon by a number of western historians. In their estimation, religion not only *must not* play a public role in culture, but it *cannot* play such a role in culture. An illustration of the misshapen fruit produced by this assumption on the tree of historiography on Western Europe may help us recognize its impact on the historiography on Eastern Europe.

Within the field of Reformation-era historiography, some recent publications have treated the theological stances and attitudes of the various Protestant Reformers as matters of their private orientations. Since these matters *should not* have played significant roles in the unfolding of sixteenth-century culture, they *could not* have; with this anachronistic assumption, ostensible explanations are offered for the Protestant Reformation which have nothing to do with religion. One need not be a committed practitioner of some variety of Protestant Christianity to recognize the absurdity here. Such volumes reveal more about contemporary scholarly myopia than they do about sixteenth-century developments in the west.⁴

Wide reading in the historiography of Eastern Europe has convinced me that this supposed historiographical canon has had its way with historiography on Eastern Europe.⁵ However, this presupposition runs against the grain of the actual history of Eastern Europe: throughout the region, much of public and private life for centuries has been, and even today continues to be, shaped by religion. In Eastern Europe, faith, church, culture, and nation have been all bound up together. This can be seen from the more distant past through all the centuries to the present; we can illustrate this by reference to facets of the history of the Balkans in both the distant and the recent past.

It has often been pointed out that the main reason why the Serbs and the Bulgarians were able to retain their distinct identities during a period of nearly five

⁴For a trenchant criticism of this approach and its results in Reformation scholarship, see Steven Ozment, *Protestants: The Birth of a Revolution* (Doubleday, 1992), pp. 30-31.

⁵I will not unnecessarily freight this paper with all the evidence of this wide reading; for that, one can consult my "Revisioning the Historiography of Eastern Europe" (as in n. 2). In this treatment, I will only cite works that directly speak to or significantly fail to address the role of religion in the history of Eastern Europe.

centuries of Ottoman rule was the tenacity of their respective Orthodox churches.⁶ For the peoples and leaders of these nations, down to the present day, to be Serb (or Bulgar) has also been to be Orthodox. Separation of religion from the public sphere, as practiced in the west, is inconceivable within these nations. Among them, religion has continued to shape perception, both of self and of others--not only through the centuries of Turkish control, but also for the decades of Communist domination. This pattern has been true also for their neighbors (the Croats, the Romanians, and--*mutatis mutandis*--the Bosnian Muslims). Surely this ought to be taken into careful consideration in any account of the history or the present situation of these peoples. Indeed, how can one claim to treat the history of the Balkans these peoples inhabit without explicit attention to the significance of religion and the role it has played in that long history?

The last decade of Balkan history gives abundant testimony of the significant role played by religion in the history of the region for those with a modicum of sensitivity to its potential influence. In this regard, though, the historiographical results have been especially disappointing. The warfare in the former Yugoslavia received exhaustive (and exhausting!) commentary by western pundits, from television reporting through print journalism to scholarly assessment in monographs and articles. Given the overwhelming amount of material thus produced, it is striking how little attention was given to the role played by religion: it is not too much to say that it was almost altogether neglected or overlooked.

For all the excellence of its treatment in other regards, Lenard Cohen's *Broken Bonds: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia* (Westview Press, 1993) is vitiated by its total omission of religious components in the breakdown of and subsequent war within the former Yugoslavia. Given his recognition that traditional religious antagonisms had played a significant role in the outbreak of conflict in 1990 and subsequently, this omission is remarkable.⁷ In the second edition of this work (1995), even though he adds

⁶E. Garrison Walters, *The Other Europe: Eastern Europe to 1945* (Syracuse University Press, 1988), p. 28; Dennis P. Hupchick offers a detailed consideration of how this transpired in Bulgaria, despite considerable obstacles, in his *The Bulgarians in the Seventeenth Century: Slavic Orthodox Society and Culture Under Ottoman Rule* (McFarland & Company, 1993).

⁷Cohen cites, with approval, a sociological study which came to this conclusion (p. 269), and

the assessment that the ethnoreligious commitments and intolerance were discernible by the late 1980s,⁸ this revised edition still fails to offer any consideration of religious factors. A similar pattern is found in other works on the war in the former Yugoslavia; e.g., Alex N. Dragnich, of Yugoslavian extraction himself but educated in the west, points out in his *Serbs and Croats: The Struggle in Yugoslavia* (Harcourt Brace & Company, 1992) that religious differences have profoundly divided the South Slavs for centuries⁹; however, having acknowledged that, he never again mentions religious division or considers its contribution to the recent war in his treatment.

Paul Mojzes has attempted to fill this desideratum with some of the works he has produced. Early on, he indicated that he recognized a serious lack in the works treating the warfare in the former Yugoslavia. In his *Yugoslavian Inferno: Ethnoreligious Warfare in the Balkans* (Continuum, 1994), he noted, “there is a great need for understanding the cause of the present great convulsion, *especially the role of the religious communities in it that most other analysts have ignored*, and to explore the approaches toward a solution.”¹⁰ The rest of that work sought to remedy the deficiency somewhat by offering sustained analysis of religion’s role. Subsequently, he edited another work, *Religion and the War in Bosnia* (Scholars Press, 1998),¹¹ which offers still further corrective. While no one knowledgeable in the history of the former Yugoslavia

himself notes “the Balkan region’s traditional proclivity for ethnoreligiously based violence at times of regime breakdown,” a situation that in his estimation made the savagery of ethnic conflict almost predictable (p. 270). Nevertheless, his monograph offers no consideration whatsoever of religious components involved in or contributing to the breakdown of Yugoslavia or to the war which ensued in Bosnia.

⁸This citation is found at p. 333; the second edition includes a lengthy new chapter on the warfare in Bosnia and has been revised extensively enough that it has a new sub-title: Lenard Cohen, *Broken Bonds: Yugoslavia’s Disintegration and Balkan Politics in Transition* (Westview Press, 1995).

⁹Dragnich, p. 3.

¹⁰Mojzes, p. xv (emphasis added); at the end of his introduction, Mojzes explains that he wrote the book especially to remedy this deficiency in the treatment of the contributing factors in the war within the former Yugoslavia (p. xxi).

¹¹Given what was noted above, it is striking that among the contributors to the volume was Lenard Cohen. His treatment (“Bosnia’s ‘Tribal Gods’: The Role of Religion in Nationalist Politics” [pp. 43-73]) indicates a recognition of the significance of religion in preparing for and influencing the course of the war—a recognition notable by its absence in his book cited above. [The essays had earlier appeared in REE - ed.]

or the conflagration which broke out within it in the early 1990s would assert that the warfare was all and only religious at basis, or that the contribution of religion to that warfare did much credit to religion, one cannot do justice to an understanding of that horrendous war if the religious component so prominent in the self-understanding of the respective participants in it and in their attitudes toward their opponents is omitted from consideration.

Recognizing the Role of Religion in the History of Eastern Europe

Religion's formative influence cannot be limited to the history of Southeastern Europe, religion has also significantly impacted the histories of the states of the northern tier of the region. Historiography on Eastern Europe must begin to give sustained and serious attention to the role of religion within that history. To do that, it will be necessary to distinguish various levels or kinds of influence which religion has historically wielded. I will point out four distinguishable and historiographically discernible ways in which religion has influenced Eastern European history.

(1) Religion as Culture-forming

A profoundly significant way religion has influenced the history of Eastern Europe is its contribution to the formation of the dominant cultures in the region. Recently, this has received noteworthy emphasis: a welcome change to the dominant patterns of historiography on Eastern Europe in this regard has appeared with the publication of Dennis P. Hupchick's *Culture and History in Eastern Europe* (St. Martin's Press, 1994). Not only does he treat the history of Eastern Europe in broader sweep (from earliest historical records to the present), but he also orients his treatment on the distinctive cultures which have shaped Eastern Europe. Hupchick asserts forthrightly, "the most fundamental expressions of culture are religious beliefs, languages, and philosophies" (p. 5). As he proceeds through his treatment, he deals with the macrocultures of Western Christianity, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Islam--the three religions that have profoundly shaped the peoples and nations of Eastern Europe.¹²

¹²This approach also informs his *Conflict and Chaos in Eastern Europe* (St. Martin's Press, 1995), as well as the work he co-authored with Harold E. Cox, *A Concise Historical Atlas of Eastern Europe* (St. Martin's Press, 1996).

It is to be hoped that this orientation will increasingly be appreciated in the historiography on Eastern Europe. It unquestionably offers a better account of longstanding tensions within the region than any simply political or economic assessment. While Hupchick's presentation has its weaknesses in some regards,¹³ it is nevertheless a noteworthy contribution to and advance in the historiography.

(2) *Religion's Influence on National Development*

Within Eastern Europe, perhaps more so than in the west, religion has profoundly shaped the history of the nations, as well as their relationships with each other. This can readily be seen with all the countries. Here, we will limit our considerations, first to Poland and Russia and their relationship, and then to the Bohemians/Czechs.

Simply put, an understanding of either Poland or Russia or their relationship through the centuries must take into account the significance of the contrasting religious allegiances which have historically marked the two countries. The Russian conviction that Moscow was Third Rome, the successor to the Christian imperial heritage of fallen Byzantium and the only free state adhering to (Eastern) Orthodoxy, may not have been definitively articulated until the early sixteenth century,¹⁴ but by the late fifteenth century the leaders of Muscovy already recognized their realm as the legitimate political and

¹³While Hupchick emphasizes the formative role of religion in the broad sense, too much of what he presents about religion in the narrower sense is inaccurate. Hupchick manifests confusion about ancient Christian teaching: *e.g.*, no Church father would have allowed that one can "define" (Hupchick's term) either "the Christian deity" or "the exact nature of each person involved in the mix [sic]" (p. 86); nor did they use the term "substance" about Christ in the uninformed (and inconsistent) ways Hupchick does (at pp. 87-90). As well, he sometimes gets the data wrong: *e.g.*, Monophysitism did not believe that "Christ was not truly human but a divine apparition who only looked human" (p. 138)--that was the view of docetism, not monophysitism; further, if a date is to be given to the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, it should be 1517, not 1515 (pp. 99, 123). In addition, Hupchick's broader assessments of developments within the history of Christianity leave something to be desired: his claim that the Protestant Reformation was really about breaking the Western Christian macroculture down into "independent political institutions of the microcultures themselves" (pp. 27-28) tells us more about Hupchick than it does about what the Reformation's leaders sought; in that regard, his desperate appeal that "One need only consider the 'reform' of the church in England by King Henry VIII . . . to understand the true significance of the Reformation for the West" (p. 123) is, for anyone well-versed in the history of the Reformation, simply mind-boggling.

¹⁴Although this idea had been widely expressed in the mid-fourteenth century (Cyril Toumanoff, "Moscow the Third Rome: Genesis and Significance of a Politico-Religious Idea," *The Catholic Historical Review* 40 [1955]:436-437; Francis Dvornik, *The Slavs: Their Early History and Civilization* [American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1959], p. 339), it received its classic formulation in a letter of 1510 to Basil III (r. 1505-1533) from the monk Philotheus of Pskov.

religious successor to the Byzantine Empire and acted on that conviction.¹⁵ Polish advances into the lands of the former Kievan Rus' (which Muscovy considered her birthright)¹⁶ during the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries were in the eyes of the Russians more than militaristic adventurism; they were also assaults by heretics and schismatics--the Poles were Roman Catholic--against a state committed to protecting and advancing Orthodoxy as the true Christian faith. As another manifestation of the Western Christian duplicity that had ravaged Constantinople in the name of holy war in the Fourth Crusade of 1204, Polish onslaughts required both military and spiritual opposition. In due course, Russia's participation in the dismemberment of Poland in the late eighteenth century involved not only the attempt to rid herself of a dangerous political rival, but also the elimination of the theological and ecclesiastical corruption which, to Russian perspectives, Poland embodied.

For her part, Poland's steadfast devotion to Roman Catholicism in subsequent generations embodied more than simple opposition to her tsarist rulers; down to this day, it has also shaped Polish self-understanding--as Poland's Communist leaders found out, to their consternation.¹⁷ No less a Polish intellectual than Pope John Paul II said, during his first visit to Poland after his election as pope, "It is impossible without Christ to understand the history of the Polish nation." Western historians attempting to write about the history of Poland are hardly in a position to disagree knowledgeably.

Furthermore, one can hardly make sense of the history of the Czechs unless one takes serious account of the role religion has played in that history. In that regard, one

¹⁵Basil II (r. 1425-1462) declared himself, as ruler of Muscovy, the protector of Orthodoxy; his son, Ivan III (r. 1462-1505), manifested his understanding that he and his people had stepped into the place recently vacated by Byzantium: in 1472 he married the niece of the last Byzantine emperor, and in 1480 he adopted the title Tsar (Russian for "Caesar"), along with the Byzantine two-headed eagle for his coat of arms (Dvornik, *The Slavs: Their Early History and Civilization*, p. 339; Toumanoff, pp. 439-441). I recognize that the "Third Rome" view has been stringently criticized by some historians who have dealt with Slavic history (among them, the redoubtable Dimitri Obolensky, in his *The Byzantine Commonwealth* [Phoenix Press, 2000; reprint of 1971 ed.], at pp. 364-367); alternative interpretations of the relevant data remain unconvincing to me, however.

¹⁶In the mid-fourteenth century, Casimir (Kazimierz) III of Poland had invaded the former territories of Kievan Rus'; subsequently, Poland took advantage of Moscow's "Time of Troubles," ultimately marching to the gates of Moscow, and besieging the city from 1610 to 1612.

¹⁷Cf. Joseph Rothschild, *Return to Diversity: A Political History of East Central Europe Since World War II*, 2d ed. (Oxford University Press, 1993) pp. 86-87, 197-198.

must give special attention to Jan Hus and his religious influence, as well as to the religious import of the 30 Years' War. The Hussite achievement of independence *vis-à-vis* the rest of Europe, and especially the Western Christian church, has been a defining moment in Bohemian/Czech self-understanding. The Hussite revolt was, among other things, a result of the long-standing Bohemian resentment of economic, political, and ecclesiastical domination by the Germans, who had been invited into Bohemian territory by Bohemian kings during the twelfth century to benefit the Bohemian state. By 1526, though, Bohemia was again subsumed under Germanic rule, owing to the 1516 family compact signed by the Bohemian king and the Habsburg ruler of Austria. This set the stage for another reaction against German domination, again laced with religious tensions.

During the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the vast majority of the Bohemian nobles embraced Protestantism. That commitment may or may not have been religiously deep; it was certainly politically charged. Within Bohemia, religion and nationality again converged: against the resented dominance by the Germanic Habsburg emperors, the champions of Roman Catholicism, Bohemia's leaders flocked to the banner of Protestantism. With the Defenestration of Prague in 1618, the 30 Years' War--for which religious differences served as the clarion call to arms (even though many other factors also contributed to the war)--began. At the Battle of White Mountain in 1620, Habsburg forces resoundingly defeated the Bohemian forces led by Protestant nobles. That battle resulted in the death or exile of virtually the entire noble class of Bohemia--and with that, the brutal subjugation of Bohemia under Germanic domination again. One need only speak to a Czech about the Battle of White Mountain--as I have done--to appreciate the ongoing trauma of that event. To this day, Czechs grieve over the loss of their nation in 1620, when its leaders were eliminated in the turbulence of a war justified in the name of religion. This also goes a long way toward accounting for another noteworthy assessment of the Czechs over the last many generations. Since not only Protestant Bohemians but also those Bohemians who had remained within the Roman obedience were again brought under German dominance, it is not surprising that Bohemians/Czechs have become the most secularized, non-religious people of Eastern Europe. In its own negative way, this also demonstrates the role of religion--among other

things--in shaping the development of nations throughout Eastern Europe.

(3) *Disagreements in Religious Teaching*

In addition to religion's culture-forming and nation-shaping significance, one must also recognize that differences in doctrine between Western Christianity and Eastern Orthodoxy have significantly influenced the history of Eastern Europe. Differing religious allegiances distinguished the various Eastern European peoples from each other; behind these distinctions lurked significant disagreements in doctrine. While the sharp articulation of differences between Western Christianity (whether in its Roman Catholic or Protestant forms) and Eastern Orthodoxy awaited the Slavophile declarations of the nineteenth century,¹⁸ the disagreements did not wait until then to manifest themselves, be recognized, and have impact on the history of Eastern Europe. Leaders in church and state were familiar with those differences and, whether from deep conviction or cavalier opportunism, they made much of them; either way, those differences exerted significant influence within that history.

Already in the ninth century, the Byzantine patriarch Photios denounced the Western Christian view of the Trinity and its unilateral modification of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, promulgated by the whole Christian church in an ecumenical council.¹⁹ Concern with this western departure figured prominently in Eastern Christianity in the following centuries.²⁰ Subsequently, the Hesychast Controversy of the first half of the fourteenth century made clear to the churches of Eastern Orthodoxy just how different Western Christian approaches to devotion and theology were from those in long use among the Orthodox.²¹

¹⁸Piotr S. Wandycz, *The Price of Freedom: A History of East Central Europe from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Routledge, 1992), p. 2.

¹⁹J. M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire* (Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 78, 84-85, 87.

²⁰The Council of Blachernae in 1285 repudiated the Western Christian perspective on the doctrine of the Trinity and the changes to the creed, reaffirming instead (with further explanation) the perspective of Patriarch Photios: cf. the treatment by Aristeides Papadakis, *Crisis in Byzantium: The Filioque Controversy in the Patriarchate of Gregory II of Cyprus (1283-1289)* (Fordham University Press, 1983).

²¹John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (The Faith Press, 1964), pp. 237-240; for an overview of the subsequent influence of hesychasm within Orthodoxy, to the present day, see also his *St.*

While it cannot reasonably be claimed that the average person in Eastern Europe would have been well-versed in the particulars of these (and other) theological divergences between the faith and practice of Western Christianity and Eastern Orthodoxy, that should not lead to the assumption that they knew nothing of them or cared little for them. Religious exclusiveness is not necessarily predicated upon thorough understanding of disputed points; religion can lead to prejudice as readily as to understanding, to hate of neighbors perhaps even more easily than to love of them. For the various peoples of Eastern Europe, the scar of the Fourth Crusade, or the lack of support from the Christian West for Orthodox Constantinople in her waning days, or the subsequent period of imperial domination (by Muslim Turks, Roman Catholic Austrians, Protestant Germans, or Orthodox Russians), or a host of other religion-related irritants have assured that religion has never disappeared from collective consciousness. For the peoples of Eastern Europe, religious distinctiveness has remained something more than a merely theoretical or intellectual interest. Issues shaped by or attributed to religion have been absorbed into the thoughts and attitudes of the various peoples of Eastern Europe, whatever religious commitment is embraced by the particular nation, in numerous ways.

(4) Religion as People-Shaping

While religion cannot get on without teachings, its influence on people is not limited to what can be communicated in doctrines. Peasant life throughout both Western and Eastern Europe was long shaped by religion; with the survival of peasant structures in Eastern Europe past the end of World War II, religion has had an abiding influence on the average inhabitants of the region. Some historians have recognized its importance for the peasants of Eastern Europe: according to Thomas W. Simons, Jr., “Religion often played a major role in peasant life . . . Religion’s framework and purpose were everywhere [within Eastern Europe] the same: It was designed to protect peasants from the outside world, and where possible to make it useful to them”²² For the common people of Eastern Europe, the dictates of religion--not only whatever doctrinal understandings they might have gathered, but also the ways of viewing others and hoping

Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), pp. 131-170.

²²Thomas W. Simons, Jr., *Eastern Europe in the Postwar World*, 2d ed. (St. Martin’s Press: New York, 1993), p. 6.

for the future--shaped cultural practice and were ingrained in everyday life.

This brings our considerations back almost full circle, to the consideration of people's basic orientation on life--*i.e.*, to the formation of culture. Paul Mojzes addresses this when he notes regarding Eastern Europe, "Traditionally, religion was enmeshed with all other cultural and civilizational aspects of life to the degree that it was not possible to clearly delineate where religions ended and politics, art, or science began, and vice versa. . . . Religion is, then, a collective as well as an individual experience that infuses all cultural factors of private and public life" ²³

CONCLUSION

Religion has profoundly shaped the history of Eastern Europe in a variety of ways and from various angles, but historiography on Eastern Europe has hardly even noticed religion's influence within that history. The failure of historiography on Eastern Europe to acknowledge and analyze that influence has been a significant flaw which needs to be corrected in this period when that historiography is necessarily going through considerable change. Bluntly put, it would be both parochial and foolhardy if western scholars continued to ignore and overlook the role of religion in the history of Eastern Europe, as has usually been the case since the inception of the discipline. Historians would do well to consider what Fred A. Reed, a journalist from North America who has lived in the southern Balkans for nearly thirty years, has to say on this point. He distinguishes between the western attitude toward faith and life and that found throughout the

²³Paul Mojzes, "The Camouflaged Role of Religion in the War in Bosnia and Herzegovina" (pp. 74-98 in his *Religion and the War in Bosnia*), p. 77.