

Reviewed by **Paul Mojzes, Rosemont, PA.**

Mirko Blagojević and Dragan Todorović, eds., *Orthodoxy from an Empirical Perspective*. Niš and Belgrade: Yugoslav Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, 2011. 241 pp. ISBN 978-86-86597-12-2.

This book is one of the occasional publications issued by the same scholarly institute in Niš, Serbia, that publishes the periodical *Teme*. This group consisting of mostly sociologists gathered around the key figure of Prof. Dragoljub Djordjević, often venture into areas not previously examined by Balkan scholars. In this case they are trying to provide insights into the one major branches of Christianity, Eastern Orthodoxy, which has not been explored as thoroughly as Catholicism and Protestantism. Some of the contributors bemoan the paucity of recent studies on Orthodoxy in the major languages and highlight that only James Payton (who is one of the regular contributor to *REE* and a former president of CAREE) had written a book, *Light from the Christian East: An Introduction to the Orthodox Tradition* in addition to a British publication, *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity*.

The book consists of eighteen chapters grouped under three topics: I. Orthodoxy from a Legal-Politological and Theoretical-Methodological Perspective, II. Orthodox Religiosity, Value Orientations and Social Capital, and III. Orthodox Faith and Culture in Contemporaneity. Most of the chapters deal with Orthodoxy in Serbia and Montenegro with occasional reflections on Russia and even more rarely to Greece. The one Bulgarian author, Nonka Bogomilova (pp. 75-80), did not specifically deal with Bulgarian Orthodoxy but provided more general theoretical reflections on the “confessionalization” of the scholarly study of religion (the Eastern Orthodox case). Bogomilova’s chapter (she has previously contributed articles to *REE*) was written in fairly fluent English, in sharp contrast to the vast majority of chapters.

Some of the chapters were seemingly included not because they pertain directly to the sociological or empirical study of Orthodoxy but because the editors were hoping to diversify the pool of authors. Thus the Greek scholar Alexios Panagopoulos (pp. 7-17) provided a technical discussion on the relationship of customs to canon law, proposing that customs are unwritten legal rule co-equal with canon law in regard to validity. The Slovene sociologist, Sergej Flere (pp. 37-48), who previously taught in Serbia, reflects on Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights with the observation that a specific Orthodox pattern of problems seems to be emerging. Helen Mchedlova and Julija Simelina explored Russian issues. Mchedlova (pp. 49-53) examined human rights and the state of religiosity in Russia whereas Simelina (pp. 83-88) provided a genuine empirical study of Orthodox and Muslim value orientations in the Russian Federation. The Bosnian sociologist Ivan Cvitković (pp. 55-67) offered a very generalized article on issues affecting the sociology of religion with only marginal references to Orthodoxy. He first examines whether it is better for a sociologist of religion to be religious or not and then provides instructions on the do’s and don’t’s of field work in order to get valid results, as if he were instructing students on how to carry out field work.

Dragan Novaković (pp. 19-36) gave a historical overview of laws regarding the Orthodox Church in Serbia from 1836 to 2006. He discerns four periods, the first being the Principality of Serbia when the Serbian Orthodox Church (hereafter SOC) was the established church, Kingdom

of Yugoslavia when Orthodoxy was partially separate but the state was sovereign over the church, Communist Yugoslavia where the separation of church and state was complete except that the state restricted the activities of all churches, and contemporary Serbia attempting to implement European standards in regard to religious legislation.

Another article written in good English is Mirko Blagojević's (pp.89-99) about Orthodox religiosity in Serbia at the end of the 2010. He measured "religiousness" by field study methods and concluded that there is a strong rise in religious self-identification which is, however, nearly empty of concrete content ("belonging without believing"). These conclusions resemble those of Vladimir Bakrač (pp. 101-114) who undertook empirical studies with Montenegrin Orthodox youth who also display a strong Orthodox identity but very rarely go to church. Two other Montenegrin scholars, Dragoljub Krneta and Aleksandra Šević (pp. 115-125) found the greatest correspondence between religiosity of young people and their family's practice of prayers and reading religious literature at home and practically no correspondence with their family fasting, going to confession, or supporting the church financially.

Dragana Radisavljević-Ćiparizović (pp. 127-137) explored the phenomenon of religious pilgrimages as a frequent expression of (folk) religiosity but also of superstition. According to her both the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox Church authorities favor church religiosity over folk religiosity but that the Catholic Church is more successful in combining the two. The Orthodox recognize that magic is wrong yet retain a certain ambiguity toward it. Danijela Gavrilović and Miloš Jovanović (pp. 139-150) explored Orthodoxy in the function of social capital in Serbia and concluded that there is a very low degree of the use of religion as social capital because Orthodoxy is expected to deal only with spiritual but not social problems. For instance, one does not expect to get assistance from one's co-religionists, nor does Orthodoxy foster mutual trust, charity, volunteering, and similar. The SOC functions primarily as a repository of collective memory.

In Part III, Zoran Krstić (pp. 153-161) examined the proportion of those in SOC who are convinced believers, i.e. completely devoted to the church vs. conventional or traditional religiosity and concludes that in comparison with other European countries the situation in Serbia is comparable—and satisfactory. One wonders why David Perović's article (pp. 163-174) was included in this volume. It contains a collection of brief sayings of the late Patriarch Pavle arranged by topics, but minus the context or any annotations or explanations. On top of that they are poorly translated so that the reader has to guess what the Patriarch really meant to say.

Dragoljub Djordjević and Dragan Todorović, both of whom had recently contributed scholarly studies of the customs and beliefs of the Roma [Gypsy] population of southern Serbia, explored in this volume the relationship between Orthodox priests and Protestant Roma (pp. 175-188). Roma of that area were mostly Orthodox or Muslim but a significant number of them have been converted by several Neo-Protestant denominations (Adventists, Baptists, Jehova's Witnesses, and Pentecostals). By qualitative interviews of prominent and regular members they concluded that Orthodox priests did not have close contact to their Roma members, which is probably one of the reasons why Protestants have had greater success in evangelizing them.

The last two articles are by Zorica Kuburić and Marija Kuburić Borović. Z. Kuburić (pp.

189-204) carried out an in-depth empirical survey of the Orthodox Deanery in the city of Kruševac in Serbia examining the positive impact by younger priests who have better theological education from the older generation of priests and are succeeding to imbue the population with a deeper understanding of the gospel and the teachings of the church. M. Kuburić Borović (pp. 205-216) carried out a series of interviews with church musicians about the important role of music in Orthodox worship and concluded that while it is central to the liturgy, it is strictly prescribed and unchanging and that the process of secularization has not made any impact on it. The book concludes with abstracts of the articles either in Serbian or English, an index, and a biography of all of the authors.

This reviewer has mixed feelings about the book. It is not clear whether all of the chapters were translated into English by unnamed translators or whether some of them at least were written by their authors in English. The English of only two or three chapters are good, a few others are passable but some of them are so poor that it is practically impossible to discern their meaning even for someone like this reviewer who speaks the authors' languages and can guess what the authors may have intended to say in the original version of the text. Yet, I am also glad that the editors and the publishers did produce this book because they are expanding the otherwise very meager empirical studies of Orthodoxy. Therefore I applaud their efforts but wish that it had been in a more readable form. It is good to see that most of the studies carried out in Serbia were financed by a grant of the Ministry of Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

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