

Theology on *the Web.org.uk*

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes.
Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit
or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the
copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the
ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the
links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbadshaw>

A table of contents for *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* can
be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_sbet-01.php

Book Reviews

Fede e martirio: le chiese orientali cattoliche nell'Europa del Novecento: atti del Convegno di storia ecclesiastica contemporanea, Città del Vaticano, 22–24 ottobre 1998. Vatican: Congregazione per le Chiese Orientale, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2003. 509 pp., €20.00.

This collection of papers covers the origins, tribulations and rehabilitation of Eastern-Rite (or Greek) Catholic churches. Churches covered include the Ukrainian (both local and diaspora in the former Soviet Union), Belorussian, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Armenian, Albanian, Greek and Czechoslovak, and the Ruthenian dioceses of Mukachevo (Transcarpathia) and Križevci (in former Yugoslavia). Note that brief summaries in English and French conclude most papers, and that some of the papers are in English: Ukrainian Borys Gudziak's two key chapters, and the chapters on Bulgaria and Transcarpathia.

Moving accounts of persecution and of specific individuals and personal testimonies enlighten some accounts. Only one contribution, that of Boghos Levon Zekian on Armenia, requires a background which few non-specialists would possess. Lists of relevant archives, research projects and a selection of documents from the Congregation for Eastern Churches archives provide an essential resource for starting research on a tragic and unduly neglected era of contemporary church history. We are reminded that some of these churches, in particular those which came under tsarist rule, had already endured long periods of complete suppression before communism. The one Orthodox contributor and the one woman, the Greek Katherine Douramani, is very critical of her church's attitude to religious minorities. It is a pity that no other sympathetic Orthodox were involved in the colloquium, though the archivists make it clear that Orthodox martyrs and confessors should be honoured alongside Catholic ones.

Gudziak highlights the ambiguous status of these churches, past and present, from ecclesiastical, political, ethnic and national points of view. 'The beleagured identity of these churches, the borderline definition that at different times and in different ways both Orthodox and Catholic churches have given to the phenomenon of "Uniatism", has profoundly conditioned their historical experience' (p. 47). Comparing them with oppressed Latin American churches which have been well studied, he points out that 'The relationship of a church with a repressed, stateless, or, as some scholars have termed, "non-historical" nation raises questions which have not been answered in academic theological literature' (p. 29).

Most of these churches originated athwart the Carpathians among impoverished illiterate minorities, who were despised socially and politically and also had to endure the negative consequences of the predominance of the Latin rite within the Catholic communion. From my own contacts with Slovaks and reading on Transcarpathia, I

believe that at local level many members of these churches, apart from their priests who had the advantage of more rigorous training than the Orthodox, were not aware of their wider church identity. In Ukraine, Romania and Belarus' and for two decades in Czechoslovakia their churches experienced complete suppression and extreme persecution. As Cesare Alzati emphasises, with reference to Transylvania, decades of discontinuity affected not just their basic structures, institutional life and records, but forms of piety, and rituals linked to pilgrim sites and festivals. The whole anthropological dimension of their presence in society needs to be recovered. There is need too for mutual acceptance of Catholics and Orthodox which was customary until 1948, and for Orthodox recognition of Catholic property rights (so far evident only in Timișoara metropolitanate). All this is essential if Transylvania's rich cross-cultural life is ever to be restored. To quote Gudziak again: 'Having been the objects of both polemical debate and systematic violence their identity has been questioned and shaken, [but also] forged and strengthened.'

Understandably they manifest signs of a victim complex, a tendency to concentrate on their past sufferings, which is accentuated by the failure of Orthodox churches which collaborated in their repression to plead for pardon and reconciliation. Unfortunately, the heated disputes over property restitution which have soured relations between Catholics and Orthodox are barely mentioned.

Contributors provide wise guidelines for the future of these churches. Some note over-attention to hagiography rather than the affirmation of their distinctive contribution to the Catholic Church including (as regards the Ukrainians and Hungarians in particular) their married parish priests and families which provided such outstanding witness through decades of persecution, harassment and discrimination. Several contributors stress the unique value of their liturgies and warn Catholics against the easy option of succumbing to latinisation. Alzati, a Roman Catholic, is very critical of the insufficiency of the Catholic perception of Greek Catholic churches. Even the Balamand Declaration (1993), while avoiding terms like 'papist', 'heterodox' and 'schismatic', employed the belittling term 'Uniate'. With particular reference to Transylvania, where almost all Latin-rite Catholics are Hungarian or German in origin, with a few Romanians who have no local roots, western religious orders now active in their different capacities among the Greek Catholic faithful should, he urges, assume the eastern liturgical tradition as a tangible sign of their diaconia.

Among the various research projects the L'viv Institute of Church History, as described by Gudziak, is at the forefront of studies of the persecution and survival of Greek Catholic churches. It is training a new generation of historians to free themselves from received Soviet ideology and mindset, to embrace interdisciplinary and interconfessional studies, and to develop a proper methodology, avoiding nationalist history and theological polarisation. It aims to record how these churches managed to survive and individuals to keep their faith. It has to work on a shoestring budget and has faced obstruction and even sabotage of its equipment. For churches forced to go underground, which necessitated the destruction of documentary evidence, it is creating a bank of oral testimonies based on interviews of the experiences of the rank-and-file faithful. It has mounted symposia on the Union of Brest in several Ukrainian cities and in Przemyśl, Poland, to get back to the roots of Greek Catholic churches and raise the frequently emotional and ill-informed debates to a more constructive level. It even runs a pastoral programme to provide moral support and recognition to former catacomb community members. Much needs to be done for the healing of memories.

Religion and Patterns of Social Transformation edited by Dinka Marinović Jerolimov, Sinisa Zrinščak and Irena Borowik. Zagreb: Institute for Social Research, 2004.

Religion and Patterns of Social Transformation is a collaborative effort by a number of sociologists of religion. The articles were originally presented as papers at the international conference 'Religion and Patterns of Social Transformation' which was organised in Zagreb in 2001 by the International Study of Religion in Eastern and Central Europe Association (ISORECEA) and the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb. Authors from a variety of countries cover a variety of issues and geographical regions. The editorial board is likewise an international group from the region. The collection contains 19 essays grouped under the following general headings: 'Religion and social transformation: East and West'; 'Challenges of post-communist societies'; 'Religion in new Europe'; and 'Adaptation and/or transformation: religious and ecclesiastical movements'. An introductory essay by the three editors briefly outlines the ground which will be covered and highlights what they consider to be the salient points of most of the essays.

Some articles focus on individual countries or aspects of religious life therein. Particularly insightful and daring is an article which suggests that religious bodies might adopt a kind of social mimicry in a country which undergoes rapid and drastic transformation.

Other articles discuss theoretical questions of religiosity in the context of the change in values and value systems which all countries in transition experience. How much does religion adapt to this 'contradictory and paradoxical reality, a reality in which religion plays various and often hardly comprehensible roles' (p. 12), and how much does it contribute to the creation of the new social reality which emerges? In this context may be mentioned the result of a study which demonstrates that in some cases religion does not have as strong an impact on popular opinion as one might expect. The case in point is that of approval of abortion, which is higher in some traditionally strongly religious countries than in some countries with relatively low proportions of people who declare any religious affiliation. Connected to this question is the question about the relationship between statistical information and theoretical models used to interpret this information, particularly the model which sees modernism coupled with, and followed by, increasing secularisation.

Another highlight of the publication is the fact that it includes, and almost juxtaposes, studies dealing with Central/Eastern Europe with studies dealing with Western European countries. Thus one learns that religiosity in Finland, where the vast majority of the population says it belongs to the Lutheran Church, can be compared with an Eastern European country with an overwhelming Roman Catholic majority. Another interesting study compares religious life in traditionally Roman Catholic Italy with that of an equally traditionally Roman Catholic Eastern European country. The differences are not great and similarities are evident.

Yet another group of articles treats issues of pan-European scope, such as theoretical discussions about the definition and nature of 'sect', 'new religious movement' and 'cult'. An interesting question concerns the attitude of religious communities towards altruism, Europe, and the European Court of Human Rights.

Taken together the articles draw a fairly comprehensive and representative, rather than exhaustive, religious map of Europe at this point in its political, economic and social transformation. The map is a high-relief representation of the territory, although some areas remain blank, as on ancient maps.

The book cannot be read in one sitting as a novel if the reader wants to give due attention to all the authors and the topics they treat. I managed to read it in two

sittings. This was not because of lack of interest or reading fatigue. The collection is actually enjoyable and rewarding to read. The reason is that the collection contains too much useful material—statistics, facts, discussion and insights—to be absorbed quickly. Essays also differ significantly in the way their discussions are structured and in what their authors undertake to demonstrate. The overall title provides a notional umbrella for all essays and points to common areas of interest, but there is no prescribed uniform structural pattern for the essays. There is a healthy balance between case studies and discussions of a more comprehensive regional nature. All these factors coalesce to create a most insightful and instructive treatment of this significant topic.

DAVORIN PETERLIN