

Maria Hämmerli and Jean-Francois Mayer (eds)

Orthodox Identities in Western Europe. Migration, Settlement, and Innovation.

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Issues of migration and settlement have been monopolizing public debates and political conflict since the burst of refugee flows in 2015. By that time, over one million people were forcefully displaced and entered a Europe that was divided by economic hardship and right-wing populism. The year 2015 marks, in that sense, a turning point in the European religious landscape, albeit one with effects that went beyond the religious. The changing ethnic and religious composition of the host countries urges a careful, theoretical and empirical re-examination of diversity and plurality, under the pressure of a growing intolerant majority. Thus, the publication of the present volume appears at a critical moment for the study of religious identities in Europe, and of the role of religion in identity formation and retention.

The book is divided into two parts. The first discusses migration and settlement in various Western European cases, such as Orthodox communities and churches from various ethnic backgrounds in Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Finland, Sweden and the U.K. The second part is entitled "Innovation", and examines the various ways of interpreting Orthodox traditions in Denmark, Ireland, France and Britain.

The editors of the book, Maria Hämmerli and Jean-Francois Mayer, of the University of Fribourg and the Institute Religioscope in Switzerland, respectively, have undertaken a delicate and daring task: to analyze Orthodoxy as "the religious other". In an era when the main topic of scholarly focus and discussion is the presence of Islam in Europe, unveiling the under-studied Orthodox communities in a Western setting expands the idea of "otherness". The endeavor entails a number of assumptions, most of which are addressed in the introductory chapter.

First and foremost, examining Orthodox identities in a primarily Western setting means to argue about different understandings of both West and East – as well as of different interpretations of a notional East-West divide. A reader who is unfamiliar with the deeply routed, historical intra-ecclesiastical disputes that are reflected in the internal pluralism of Orthodox churches in the West (p. 2) may find it difficult to fully understand the variations of liturgical schemes, community life or habits that parishes, churches and monasteries follow abroad. It is essential, in this respect, to be provided with a detailed account of the developments and evolution of the Orthodox migratory experience in each country's case; this is what the contributing authors do.

Second, the strong and at times inextricable link between religion and ethnicity is a key factor that frames the analysis. The use of the suffixes *-ise* or *-isation*, for example, referring to the "Finnicisation" of the Orthodox Church of Finland (by Tuomas Martikainen and Teuvo Laitila) and to "orthodoxisation" (by Jean-Francois Mayer) reveals the interplay of the two and the ways in which one preponderates over the other. Sometimes ethnicity can be seen as the guarantee of proper faith, or of qualification for religious service. Berit Thorbjørnsrud, in his account of the relations of laity and clergy in Norway, describes the rejection of a newly arrived priest in an Orthodox parish as being "only a Scandinavian convert" (p. 195).

This example can take us to the third point. Migratory experiences always entail a kind of “conversion” to the new hosting environment. Acculturation strategies employed at the individual or group level change and reform the identities of the hosted (Berry 1997). The re-organisation of religious identities, in that sense, occurs in the context of a constant dialectic between tradition and modernity. The second part of the book, dealing with innovation, provides illustrative examples of this dialectic. In the words of Maria Hämmerli and Edmund Mucha: “by innovation we do not mean radical change or break with the past, but rather a creative response to a specific situation at a particular moment in time” (p. 294).

The various perceptions of Orthodox identity within new settings are illuminated by the examples of a crisis in the diocese of Sourozh in Britain, which is described by the aforementioned authors; by the issue of autochthonism in Ireland (by James Kapalo); or by the specificities of “unity and division in Russian Orthodox congregations in Denmark” (by Annika Hvithamar). Sometimes the relationship with the past is strenuous, especially when the Mother Church is dominative. Jean-Francois Mayer provides an account of the role of Russian emigrants in establishing Western rites. Sebastian Rimestad and Ernest Kadotschnikow analyze, in the same tune, “the ambivalent ecumenical relations among Russian Orthodox faithful in Germany”.

Be it in Germany or in France (Laurent Denizeau, in his contribution, provides a nuanced picture of Orthodox monastic life in France) or in the Scandinavian countries of Norway and Finland, which are less-known in terms of the Orthodox migration (Tuomas Martikainen and Teuvo Laitila give an excellent analysis of Orthodox Christianity in Finland) – the tensions between tradition, restoration and modernizing attempts are discussed in a long-term historical perspective. The examples provided in the book, however, refer mostly to *settled* Orthodox migrant communities. Thus, apart from examining the implications of migration for religious life in the country of settlement, and the impact these may have on religious life in the homeland (p. 19), it would be extremely useful to analyze Orthodox migration in the context of current developments. Specifically, it would be illuminating to examine the reactions and responses of the settled Orthodox migrant communities to the new realities arising from the growing flows of refugee and asylum seekers on the European Continent. Also, early in the introduction the editors correctly address a major methodological issue: the lack of data (either quantitative or qualitative) and of reliable measurement methods for religious identification and membership. The use of church attendance as a measure of religious adherence does not reveal much about religiosity, especially religiosity in the Orthodox context. Combining church attendance as just one indicator along with self-defined measures of religiosity and other measures of religious practices, such as frequency of praying, might give a more concise picture.

By examining Orthodox migration and settlement in a historical perspective, the editors and authors of the book have managed to provide a much-needed contribution, not only to the study of Orthodoxy but toward the refinement of theoretical and methodological tools in the field of religion and migration.

REFERENCES

- BERRY, W. J. 1997. “Immigration, Acculturation and Adaptation”. *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 46(1): 5-68.