

BOOK REVIEWS

Holy Rus': The Rebirth of Orthodoxy in the New Russia, by John P. Burgess, New Haven, Connecticut, Yale University Press, 2017, \$30.00 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0-300-22224-1*

The question about what is going on with the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) after the breakdown of the Soviet Union has concerned dozens of researchers across various scientific areas during the last decades. The gap between the repressed and almost deceased church during the Soviet Union and the powerful appearance of new churches and a hierarchy at every important political event is too obvious to ignore.

Studies on the political entanglement of the ROC, the support of and by political elites, and the historical background of the unique relationship between the state and church in Russia provide valuable information to understand the development of the church as an institution. But just as a church is more than its institutional leadership, the rebirth of the church is not solely a political circumstance. Nevertheless, comprehensive studies on the intertwining of grassroots religiosity, developments of Russian society and the strategies of “In-Churching” of the ROC are uncommon. One possible explanation for this fact is the impossibility to grasp the plurality and diversity of commitment to Orthodoxy and to the church within Russian society with the help of common sociological, theological, or anthropological methods.

Within this context, the work of John P. Burgess is impressive and challenging at the same time. Burgess, a professor of theology at the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, visited Russia several times after his first sabbatical in 2004–2005. What he offers with his book is not a comprehensive scientific analysis of the development of the post-Soviet ROC, but rather a deep and personal insight into the life of the church. Firmly based on current standard research on the ROC and its teachings, and well informed about decisive structures and people within the ROC, he approaches Russian Orthodoxy in the 21st century from within.

Burgess applies the concept of “Holy Rus'” in deliberate distance from the ideological and political implications as “a vision of the transfiguration of reality” (208). Based on this divide, the seemingly outdated idea of the “rebirth” of orthodoxy in Russia gains new actuality: what Burgess strives for is not to measure how successful the rebirth was in terms of numbers and statistics, but rather focus on how apt the declaration of Orthodox Russia is in terms of a transfigured reality after the Soviet Union. This deliberately unpolitical approach is worth discussing, especially in relation to the offensive political use and abuse of the concept of Holy Rus' in recent years especially regarding the context of the crisis in Ukraine. It nevertheless opens new perspectives on the informal understanding of its societal spirit.

In four chapters, Burgess exemplifies this wider approach on the idea of “Holy Rus',” investigating the spheres of religious education, social ministry, the new martyrs, and parish life. Within each chapter, he relates historical background, the basic documents and teachings, and official statements and institutional structures to the local activities of parishes and believers and his personal experience. As a result, he can draw a very differentiated portrait of the situation of Orthodoxy in current Russia beyond theological idealization and political instrumentalization. For every case of the core issues of the social life of the church, he points out the historical developments, conflicts, and perspectives, simultaneously underlining the obvious trenches between idealistic religious claims and the very limited number of people actually feeling addressed by these claims.

Departing from his personal experience, Burgess does not hide his own doubts, conflicts, and irritations. He tries to keep the scientific distance of an observer whose responsibility is not to

* This article has been updated to correct a typesetting error.

judge but to shed light on the whole specter of reality. By providing detailed information on the church's developments concerning pastoral care, social work, and education between political demands, societal needs, power struggles, and theological claims, Burgess offers a comprehensive understanding of current Russian Orthodox religious identity. Furthermore, he provides a remarkable insight into crucial but less well-known official documents of the church on issues such as social work or mission. They often take a different focus than the public statements of the church's leadership, but have a much deeper impact on the behavior and praxis of local parishes.

For political scientists and researchers of other social sciences, the personal approach of Burgess might seem insufficient due to its lack of specific sociological methods. More than once, the author's fascination with traditional Orthodox spirituality and his experience of the vivid faith of his hosts hamper clear conclusions regarding the impact of the church's aims. But it is essential to keep in mind that only by going beyond sociological methods can a complex issue like religiosity and religious self-identification be properly captured. The attempt to give the reader a sense of the transcendent and mystical elements of Russian Orthodoxy is highly valuable in a context of strict material categorizing of the impact and entanglement of church and politics. Burgess, therefore, adds a much needed and helpful option within the existing scientific discourse on the role of the ROC in current Russia.

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Order at the Bazaar: Power and Trade in Central Asia, by Regine A. Spector, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 2017, \$49.95 (hardcover), ISBN 9781501709326

The nebulous notion of “weakness” in post-Soviet Central Asian states refers to their falling short in expected capacities to exercise stately prerogatives within their borders, following John Heathershaw and Ed Schatz in their recent *Paradox of Power*. Deficits in legitimacy, accountability, stability, legal compliance, justice, and even the defining monopoly on the use of deadly force certainly characterize, to various extents, the region's states during their brief quarter-century history. However, does this framework tell the entire story about conditions on the ground in these republics? Is “weakness” in state order reflected in disorder across different domains of life?

Regine A. Spector answers not necessarily. She argues that political and economic order can actually be made locally through astute and persistent negotiation work by innovative entrepreneurs. To arrive at this possibly counter-intuitive finding, she needs to turn to specific sites and persons, local arrangements of power and money, fluid negotiations between multiple parties, articulations with formal political structures, and specific path-dependent micro-histories. She drills down to grounded case studies, using interviews, observations, national media, historical archives, organization reports, and data sets. But as with any quality close-up study, she also links the face-to-face level to larger scale phenomena and structures. The hybrid approach results in uncovering local domains of social trust, stable mutual expectations, and sustainable economic practices that are not perhaps predicted by mainstream social science under weak rule of law.

The Central Asian bazaar seems to be the last place to look for order. Many Central Asians themselves viewed bazaars as epitomizing lawlessness, crudeness, messiness, and exploitation as a picture of the general disappointment with post-Soviet society. Yet, these markets are a key economic and social institution in the region. From the collapse of the Soviet Union until 2005,