

Steinberg, Mark D.; Wanner, Catherine (Hrsg.): *Religion, Morality, and Community in Post-Soviet Societies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2008. ISBN: 978-0-253-22038-7; 350 S.

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Claims that religious and spiritual beliefs are inexorably eroded by the advance of 'modernity' have been undermined in recent years. This is the main argument made in an excellent, multidisciplinary article collection by Mark Steinberg and Catherine Wanner. Developments within the former Soviet Union have been particularly significant in this regard, with the very visible boom in religious practice which followed the collapse of communist power clearly demonstrating religion's refusal to lie down and die. This religious revival has not been unproblematic, however, and the varieties of religious practice which exist across the territory of the former Soviet Union have met different fates. Within Russia – the main focus of the collection – orthodoxy has been embraced by the political elite, while other faiths and denominations increasingly face discrimination and intolerance.

The book makes a clear argument in favour of religious freedom and tolerance as essential ingredients in the development of civil society (p. 316), but it does far more than simply lament the area's failure to ensure these religious liberties. The essays instead provide probing, nuanced and thoughtful exploration of the role which religious beliefs continue to play in people's lives. As the title indicates, the volume focuses particularly on the way in which religion shapes group identities (community) and individual choices (morality). Religion cannot be viewed as a compartmentalised part of life, these essays argue, for it fundamentally affects how believers act in the world, shapes how they interpret their life-stories, and provides a way to deal with the often painful dislocations of post-soviet life.

Three opening chapters focus on the Russian Orthodox Church. In an excellent first chapter, Scott Kenworthy examines the ten-

sion between spiritual contemplation and worldly action which has long existed within Russian Orthodoxy. He undermines the black-and-white stereotype of the Russian Orthodox Church as 'otherworldly', instead arguing that the church's position on its secular role, particularly in terms of its commitment to charitable activities, has never been monolithic. Irina Papkova's article, which traces the Russian Orthodox Church's attitudes towards the state from the Council („sobor“) of 1917 through to the present, likewise stresses the heterogeneous positions which continue to compete within the church. These articles both use the writings of leading church figures to argue that the Russian Orthodox Church has not developed a consistent, agreed sense of its role, either in terms of its political status (Papkova) or in terms of social function (Kenworthy).

Chapter 3 shifts the focus down to the personal. In a fascinating article, Jarrett Zigon explores the story of one Russian Orthodox woman, drawing on a series of interviews he carried out with Aleksandra Vladimirovna, a fifty-one-year-old ex-Communist Party member. According to Zigon, her narrative of her life, and her reflection on the different choices she has made in her life, suggest that a person's sense of morality does not come from one single source, but is multifaceted and heteroglossic (p. 111): Aleksandra Vladimirovna's beliefs and moral conceptions thus come not only from the Russian Orthodoxy she now embraces but also from her long-term engagement with communism (which had its own developed moral code) and with spirituality sects (to which she was attracted in the early 1990s). Just as the Russian Orthodox Church itself is not univocal, neither are individuals.

To this emerging picture of religious and moral heterogeneity, the following chapters add reflection on some of the non-orthodox belief systems which flourish both within Russia and beyond. Douglas Rogers explores the nature of change in a small Urals town long populated by Old Believers, detailing how many inhabitants supported the building of a new church, even when they themselves did not become believers. The 'Priestless' Old Belief which survived communism

has been significantly eroded, giving way to a more hierarchical, male-dominated Old Belief which now serves as the focus in a town where people were looking for ways to 'build a new moral community' (p. 144).

Sascha Goluboff's chapter turns the anthropologist's gaze to another small community: the mountain Jews of Azerbaijan. Her work explores how the internet has provided a means for those who leave the village to continue their participation in mourning practices, thus maintaining kinship ties and religious rituals at a distance. Yet here too, there is significant change: because the web allows members of the diaspora to compose laments in written, rather than oral, form, the cyclical and performative nature of traditional mourning is broken and men are able to participate in what was customarily a female domain.

Melissa Caldwell returns the focus to Moscow to show how a range of outside religious agencies and believers (from wealthy ex-pats to African refugees) have contributed to the provision of welfare for the needy. Examining the volunteers' very diverse motivations, the chapter suggests that the relationship between giver and recipient should not be seen as unidirectional: as outsiders and newcomers, volunteers often seek to create a sense of community, belonging, and moral purpose in the fast-changing, sometimes alienating, metropolis.

Katherine Metzo's chapter on Buriat shamanism shows how the past twenty years have seen a significant revival but also change in the Baikal region, with growing numbers of shamans living in cities rather than villages, and many coming from professional backgrounds (teachers, doctors, social scientists). Shamanism provides 'an antidote to modernity' (p. 240) but at the same time, and in order to negotiate the realities of post-Soviet life, it has become organized, with some shamans seeking administrative recognition, purchasing land, creating a presence on the web, and exploiting other forms of modern media.

Thus while the collapse of communism has revealed, and prompted, the re-emergence of religious beliefs and practices which had survived the Soviet regime's atheist endeavours,

these are themselves far from static: instead they demonstrate remarkable flexibility in the face both of modernity (new technologies, urbanism, migration) and the specific developments of post-Soviet life which has been marked by high levels of economic uncertainty, the breakdown of old institutions, and varying degrees of political intervention in religious and charitable spheres.

The final two chapters focus most explicitly on the connections between political power and religious institutions in these changing times. Russell Zanca shows how the Uzbek president, Islom Karimov, has exaggerated the threat of terrorism to diminish religious liberties and explicitly argues that the US's support for him is seriously misjudged. In the final chapter, Zoe Knox uses three case-studies to explore the erosion of religious liberties within Russia over the past decade: the closure of an art exhibition entitled 'Caution, Religion!' in 2003; the limitations placed on the activities of the Catholic Church; and the banning of Jehovah's Witnesses as a dangerous and totalitarian sect in 2004. All three cases demonstrate not only the link between orthodoxy and national identity, but also the willingness of the political elite to use administrative and legal means in order to counter perceived rivals. The religious heterodoxy described in earlier chapters is thus under severe threat from the Putin/Medvedev regime.

The authors of these chapters are anthropologists, political scientists and historians and the variety of their disciplinary backgrounds is refreshing. Although the focus throughout is the present all of the chapters provide a strong sense of how the past continues to shape current behaviour and beliefs. The volume is clearly the result of ongoing dialogue between the contributors, resulting in a level of coherence which is unusual in edited volumes of this kind. „Religion, Morality, and Community in Post-Soviet Societies“ is an excellent work on a fascinating topic and all of the contributions are highly readable and informative.

HistLit 2009-3-228 / Miriam Dobson über Steinberg, Mark D.; Wanner, Catherine (Hrsg.): *Religion, Morality, and Community in Post-Soviet Societies*. Bloomington 2008, in:

H-Soz-Kult 24.09.2009.