

RUSSIAN ORTHODOXY RESURGENT: FAITH AND POWER IN THE NEW RUSSIA.
By John Garrard and Carol Garrard. Princeton University Press 2008. Pp.
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The enthronement of Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad as Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia six months ago was widely reported by international media sources, noted in political capitals around the world, and analyzed by scholars in the social sciences and religious studies. After all, Kirill is the first Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) to be elected in the post-Soviet era, thereby suggesting an ecclesiastical transition with potential significance for the broader, complex relationship between the Orthodox Church and the Russian state. In short, scholars, policymakers, and media pundits looked at the leadership change at the Moscow Patriarchate for its interpretive significance for church-state relations, and therefore, for the potential effects on more sweeping trends in Russia's democratization experiment at home and Moscow's foreign policy in regional and global contexts.

Similarly, in *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent: Faith and Power in the New Russia*, John and Carol Garrard work from the premise that any sophisticated understanding of politics and culture in post-Soviet Russia, much less of the country's engagement in world affairs, requires systematic analysis of the ROC. The authors begin from the premise that the ROC has been undergoing a dramatic institutional transformation begun in the years immediately preceding the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Garrards go further, however, to make a maximalist claim, maintaining that the last twenty years have witnessed an *aggiornamento* of the Russian Orthodox faith *writ large*; furthermore, this resurgence is central to "the Russians' recovery of their sense of themselves as a great nation (*derzhava*) . . ." (ix) following their fall from super-power status when the Soviet Union was officially dissolved in December 1991.

The book, then, relates an institutional story that is part of a far more expansive narrative about the history of political and cultural change in post-Soviet Russia; and, as suggested by the title, the Garrards intend an analysis of the content and purveyors of power. The authors' ambition is evident in the Preface, which whets the appetite of any scholar-practitioner interested in how Orthodox Christianity in Russia

fits into larger problematics: comparative categories of research on religion and democracy; systematic analysis of how church-state arrangements define the broader religious field within a country; concepts of secularism and implications for religious freedom and associated human rights; connecting dynamics of religion and nationalism; transnational religious networks and internal religious transformation; and religio-cultural features and ideological applications of competing notions of “West/Occident” versus “East/Orient.”

The Preface neatly summarizes the above conceptual and operational axes of inquiry, distilling the book’s argument into three related components. First, the authors argue that the ROC was a *sine qua non* for the democratic transition process in Russia, given the demonstrated suasion of then-Patriarch Aleksey with the military, who stood down in the face of his “threatened excommunication for anyone who took up arms against civilians” (xi) in the attempted coup of 1991. Further, they charge that “most Western academics, with important exceptions, neglected the church’s resurgence” (x), and therefore, have an incomplete understanding of the religious sources of current conceptions of national community and popular sovereignty in Russia. Finally, the Garrards insist that the East-West division of Christendom is every bit as important as the Cold War ideological split in understanding the role of religion in Russia’s locus in the global strategic map of the post-bipolar era, because “divisions of faith, because they live on in the minds of men and women, seem impervious to cartography.” (xiv)

In many ways, the book satisfies the promise of the Preface, making a persuasive case for the authors’ claims. Moreover, given that the husband-and-wife authors are both trained in the academic discipline of literature and experienced as journalists, they manage to make a millennium of complicated and complex history read as easily as a grand historical novel. The book is structured around a Prologue and Epilogue, which stand as neat bookends to each of the seven chapters, each of which explores—ultimately, in a narrative form frustratingly weak on analysis and heavy on repetition—the authors’ core claims.

The Prologue establishes the narrative trope for inquiry into the ROC’s role in the democratization project inaugurated in the mid-1980s and now stalled in the consolidation phase. What new insights this book offers stem from the interesting data suggesting that the by-now widely researched economic and political *perestroika* of Mikhail Gorbachev was shaped by an equally significant cultural *perestroika* whose core is “Russia’s thousand years of Orthodoxy, . . . the hidden mainstream coloring Russian domestic behavior.” (13) The account of the 1987

Divine Liturgy celebrated by then-Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Pimen, and then-*Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople*, Demetrios I, in the Cathedral of the Dormition (known as *Sergiev Posad*) is instructive. Permission for the celebration of this religious event was given by Gorbachev who, as President of the USSR and Communist Party since 1985, “thought the [ROC] . . . might become an ally in his campaign to modernize the country, to make it work more efficiently, and to raise the moral tone . . . [of] Soviet society.” (2) Further, Gorbachev understood the ecclesiastical event as a way to continue the ROC’s engagement in the World Council of Churches *ecumenical dialogue*, and by extension, the Helsinki Commission, thereby using religion as a means of repositioning the Soviet Union within human rights fora relevant to European security initiatives.

The Prologue also establishes the person of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia as the absolute centerpiece of the institutional story of church-state relations in Russia; indeed, more than anything else, the Garrards’ work is a biography of the late Patriarch Alexey’s leadership of the ROC from his enthronement in June 1990 until his death in December 2008. Each chapter builds on, and eventually turns to repetition on, the theme of Alexey’s vision for revitalizing and, in one plausible interpretation of his efforts, for liberating it from its thralldom to a Soviet state that had been staggeringly successful in its violent oppression of Orthodox Christians.

Emblematic is Chapter One on “The End of the Atheist Empire,” which presents Alexey’s interventions in the failed 1991 coup attempt against the new government of Boris Yeltsin (perhaps the signal event leading to the peaceful dissolution of the USSR soon after). This series of events is evaluated as the Patriarch’s successful effort to establish the ROC as the broker of a broader civil-military restructuring of authority in a post-Soviet, democratizing Russia. The authors point out that Sovietologists in the U.S. and Western European capitals missed the significance of Alexey’s appeal to the military to recognize popular will and civilian authority as the coup unfolded.

The repossession and rehabilitation of enormous amounts of ROC religious properties, whether largely destroyed or converted into politically-correct atheist sites under the Bolshevik regime, is presented in Chapter Two on “A New Hope” as Alexey’s efforts to enlist the military in the grand project of re-imagining the national community. Accordingly, Orthodox liturgical services at restored churches, as well as signature events such as returning the relics of medieval Russian military hero Alexander Nevsky to the Holy Trinity Cathedral, were part

of the Moscow Patriarch's campaign to forge a close relationship between the ROC and the military.

In a similar vein, Chapter Four on "Accursed Questions: Who Is to Blame" elaborates on Alexey's steps to "gain control of both the St. Seraphim [Russian Orthodox] and Romanov [pre-Bolshevik] cults . . ." (127), thereby positioning the ROC as arbiter of the reconstruction of national identity in post-Communist Russia. Also instructive is the authors' account in Chapter Two of the globally-mediatised razing of Dzerzhinsky's statue in front of KGB headquarters: the Garrards note, "no Western broadcast showed what happened afterward," namely, the crowd's immediate substitution of a makeshift Russian Orthodox cross marked with "By this sign, conquer," the words associated with Emperor Constantine I's fourth-century military victory leading to his establishment of the Byzantine Empire. (31)

The aforementioned examples not only illustrate the overwhelmingly biographical, narrative style of the book, but also undergird the authors' maximalist argument that the democratization process in Russia cannot be fully understood without appreciating the religiously-defined particularity of Russian nationalism. Chapter Five on "Irreconcilable Differences: Orthodoxy and the West" crystallizes an interpretation of Russian nationalism as indelibly shaped by the trajectory of the embrace of Orthodox Christianity by Kiev via Constantinople. The Garrards turn to the *longue durée* of history to evidence their claim that, for the ROC, ". . . the most dangerous adversary has always been the West—[because the] . . . 'Latinizers,' the Orthodox way of referring to [Roman] Catholicism, aimed to convert by exterminating their faith." (141) Alexey's efforts to cultivate and cement the relationship between the Orthodox faith and the political and military institutions of state power are explained as the expression of living historical memory that outweighs—understandably, from the authors' perspective—and shapes all other domestic concerns, transnational religious activities, and foreign policy perspectives, of the ROC.

The stylistic and substantive hallmarks of *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent* are also the greatest weaknesses of the book, so that the promise of the Preface is ultimately unrealized. In particular, the detailed and textured biography of Patriarch Alexey regularly devolves into hagiography and even apologia. Whatever the degree of Alexey's collaboration with the KGB—in other words, regardless of his rational assessment that cooperation with the institutional expression of Soviet totalitarianism was the least-worst means for bringing about the end of

the communist state and, for minimizing the massive human losses for which the Soviet state was directly responsible—the authors’ analysis of both the complexities and consequences of church-state relations under the Bolshevik regime is troublingly unsophisticated. There is some attention to the internal cleavages at the hierarchical level of the ROC, but these are largely told through the prism of Alexy’s putative magistracy in negotiating his ascent, by way of alliances struck with the Soviet intelligence agency and party apparatus, and later, with the Russian state elite.

Given the authors’ expertise as journalists and academics, it is disappointing that they close their Epilogue by speculating, almost admiringly, about a post-Alexey future (the book was published a bit prior to his death in December 2008) for the ROC. That future, in their view, would be one defined by “a man able to operate simultaneously in two time frames—the medieval and the modern—all the while shepherding his flock toward a future where to be Russian and to be Orthodox are one and the same.” (254)

Their conclusion grows from their puzzling lack of attention throughout the book to the protracted, internal struggle for succession that marked the last decade of Alexey’s ecclesiastical leadership of the ROC. That ecclesiastical power struggle occurred largely within the context of Russia’s now seemingly-stalled democratization project and Moscow’s efforts to redefine the country’s position in a post-bipolar world order. Further, Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, who was eventually elected Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia on Alexey’s death, honed his institutional and diplomatic skills as Head of the Department of External Affairs for the Moscow Patriarchate. There is rich data sandwiched into the middle three chapters of the book, dealing with the Romanov Dynasty’s program of integrating “Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationalism” (102); the associated roots of anti-Semitic expressions in Russia’s nineteenth-century authoritarian experience; and the striking disequilibria in the economic development trajectories and urban-rural economic dualism that were consolidated by the Soviet economic model and aggravated by the “shock therapy” economic model advocated by U.S.-trained economists who hopped onto the consulting wagon after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Disappointedly, the authors fail to analyze that data in terms of the domestic and systemic parameters that have been absolutely crucial to the evolving role of the ROC in public life and especially vis-à-vis the state, in Russia.

There is no effort to evaluate causes of the changing interpretive stance of the ROC on religious pluralism and democracy in Russia. Alexey's opposition to the ROC becoming a state church because "sooner or later the church would become a department of the State" (243), when contrasted to then-President Putin's statements at celebratory events in St. Petersburg for Centennial of the Canonization of St. Seraphim, that "Russia [is] a country of 'various faiths'" (128), points to internal tensions and paradoxes that belie the conventional view of a seamless cooperation between the ROC and the Putin-era state on Orthodoxy and nationalism in Russia.

The authors could have deployed their data to illustrate how federal-regional-local differences within the ROC institutional apparatus help to explain apparent shifts for and against liberal interpretations of democracy by the ROC. They could have explored the current views of the ROC on the phenomenon of proselytism and, more broadly, on religious freedom and human rights, contrasting the thousands of ROC monasteries and churches destroyed or refurbished as Communist Party monuments with the millions of Orthodox believers murdered and/or consigned to the gulag archipelago so chillingly described by Alexandr Solzhenitsyn. They have failed to draw on their knowledge of the origins and consequences of the Great Schism between Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christianity as an interesting, if not defining, feature in Moscow's foreign policy perspective on the Near Abroad. However, rather than make sense of those phenomena or the external affairs experiences of Alexey and Kirill and their impact on ROC views about church-state arrangements in diverse European (and non-European) societies, the authors reduce all of their data to conclusions about historical determinism and cultural necessity.

The Garrards' tendency to devolve into the civilizational trope formulated by Samuel Huntington is all the more frustrating when their data point to, but remain untouched by and seemingly unaware of, some of the most exciting scholarship directly relevant to their narrative of the ROC. Emblematic references omitted by the authors are Alfred Stepan's work on church-state arrangements analyzed in terms of religious multivocality;¹ Jose Casanova's research on proselytism and religious freedom;² Schmucl Eisenstadt's conception of multiple

1. Alfred Stepan, *Religion, Democracy, and the "Twin Tolerations"*, 11 J. DEMOCRACY 37 (2000).

2. Jose Casanova, *Balancing Religious Freedom and Cultural Preservation*, 6 REV. FAITH & INT'L AFF. 13 (2008).

modernities;³ and Maria Todorova's study of the history of ideologies of cultural (and religious) Otherness in redrawing the political and strategic map of post-Cold War Europe.⁴ The masterful works of James Billington on Russian culture,⁵ as well as the growing, careful scholarship on the institutional pluralism and role of the ROC in civil society by historians and political scientists such as Wallace Daniel⁶ and Zoe Knox,⁷ are also overlooked by the Garrards' efforts at institutional deconstruction and analysis of the church-state relationship as part of Russia's democratization project.

Although the book disappoints in terms of its theoretical robustness and analytical rigor, the Garrards deserve credit for their textured biography of Patriarch Alexey and the related symbolic and literal rebuilding of a church whose human and structural devastation under the Soviet regime was puzzlingly neglected by most U.S. scholar-practitioners during the Cold War. In this regard, *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent: Faith and Power in the New Russia* is a fascinating, if sometimes confusing, read for those interested in the historical factors influencing the ROC's ambivalent stance and contradictory role in the highly contested processes of political liberalization and societal pluralization underway in post-Communist Russia.

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3. S.N. Eisenstadt, *Multiple Modernities*, 129 DAEDALUS 1 (2000).

4. MARIA TODOROVA, *IMAGINING THE BALKANS* (1997).

5. *E.g.*, JAMES H. BILLINGTON, *RUSSIA IN SEARCH OF ITSELF* (2004); JAMES H. BILLINGTON, *THE ICON AND THE AXE: AN INTERPRETIVE HISTORY OF RUSSIAN CULTURE* (photo. reprint 1994) (Vintage Books ed., 1970).

6. *E.g.*, WALLACE L. DANIEL, *THE ORTHODOX CHURCH AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN RUSSIA* (2006).

7. *E.g.*, ZOE KNOX, *RUSSIAN SOCIETY AND THE ORTHODOX CHURCH: RELIGION IN RUSSIA AFTER COMMUNISM* (2004).

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