

Manuscript 2431

Book Review: Orthodoxy in Two Manifestations: The Conflict in Ukraine as Expression of a Fault Line in World Orthodoxy, by Bremer, Brüning, and Kizenko

Paul Crego

Paul B. Mojzes

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree>



Part of the [Christian Denominations and Sects Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies Commons](#)

BOOK REVIEW

Thomas Bremer, Alfons Brüning, and Nadieszda Kizenko (eds). *Orthodoxy in Two Manifestations: The Conflict in Ukraine as Expression of a Fault Line in World Orthodoxy*. Peter Lang, 2022.

Reviewed by Paul Crego (PC), Book Review Editor and Paul Mojzes (PM), Editor-in-Chief, OPREE¹

[PC] “Introduction,” (pp. 11-18)

The editors have divided the book into four sections: 1. Orthodoxy Global and Local, 2. Conceptualizations, 3. Ecclesiological issues, and 4. Church, State, and Society. This volume was published just before the Russian Federation undertook a further escalation of its previous invasions of Ukraine. The February 2022 invasion was the most brutal of all and taught us that Putin’s desire was to erase Ukraine from all maps and to destroy the concept of “Ukrainian,” as to whether culture, nationality, language, or literature existed at all. The fact that the Russian Orthodox Church has provided ecclesiastical and theological cover for the Putin regime’s merciless war, has heightened the world-wide conflicts in the Orthodox Church that had been brewing for some time, especially since the fall of the Soviet Union. All of this makes the publication of this book most timely.

The review gives brief, but helpful, summaries to the chapters.

Part I. Orthodoxy Global and Local

[PC] John H. Erickson, “Territorial Organization of the Orthodox Church: Historical and Canonical Background to a Current Crisis,” (pp. 23-44)

John Ericson, former Dean of St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, in his chapter “Territorial Organization of the Orthodox Church,” gives a wide-ranging history of the issues involved in talking about how the Orthodox Church has organized itself according to canonical and non-canonical structures. He begins with the Nicene canons, criticizing the Church for trying to follow these canons and not adjusting for the realities of modern times—acknowledging the difficulties of using fourth century rules for 21st century realities. In the context of modern realities, Ericson points out that much of territorial ecclesiology is based on imperial facts that no longer exist.

In addition to Nicaea I, the Council of Chalcedon is also important for some of the definition of church territory, especially when it speaks of the See of Constantinople. Constantinople’s territorial reality has greatly shifted since Chalcedon. Modern arguments between the Patriarch of Moscow and the Patriarch of Constantinople clearly show these problems. The arguments over Ukraine are especially problematic, whether one tries to argue from either antiquity or imperial reality.

Ericson also gives some detail about the issues of depopulation and deurbanization that have changed the relationship of ecclesiology to territoriality. This would have been an opportune time to point out the relics of ancient geography in the assigning of defunct cities to bishops in the

¹ Chapters reviewed by Paul Crego are prefaced with [PC] and those by Paul Mojzes by [PM].

United States. At the same time newly Christianized nations, when granted Patriarchs, showed that the concept of autocephaly” was changing as defined by independently run churches to that of expressing national churches.² Ericson points out that this evolves also into the ethnic definitions of churches. At the same time, the Patriarchate of Constantinople promoted its own authority, as derived not from an empire or nation, but as a universal one. The Orthodox leadership in Constantinople ”excelled at projecting 19th-century aspirations onto the past, though of course they were not the only ones doing it.” (p. 39) After decline in the 19th century the Patriarchate of Constantinople came more into direct conflict with the restored Moscow Patriarchate. Constantinople considered granting autocephaly to be part of its modern authority. This claim came into conflict with Moscow’s, as churches were established granted authority. This conflict comes to a head over the Orthodox Church in Ukraine.

[PC] Vera Tchentsova, “The Patriarchal and Synodal Act of 1686 in Historiographical Perspective.” pp. 45-69.

Vera Tchentsova, Senior Researcher at the Institute for South-East European Studies of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest, has written a detailed description of the Patriarch and Synodal Act of 1686. She has done this in the modern context of the jurisdictional conflicts, especially between the Patriarchs of Constantinople and Moscow. She acknowledges that the various Orthodox Churches often seek to base their authority on the most ancient documents that speak to the issue at hand.

The main question she is working out is especially important in the Ukraine, as Moscow and Constantinople have competed for the authority to define the place of Ukrainian Orthodoxy in the structure of World Orthodoxy, particularly in regards to the issue of whether the Church in Ukraine should be autocephalous or not.

[PM] Heta Huskainen, “The Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Social Ethos of the Ecumenical Patriarch: A Comparison of Central Aspects.” (pp. 73-95)

Heta Huskainen, Senior Researcher of Systematic Theology at the University of Eastern Finland, writes about a pair of documents: in 2000 the Russian Orthodox Church adopted, “The Basis of the Social Concept,” while in 2020 the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople issued “For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church.” Perhaps the basic difference between the documents is that the Moscow document specifies rules of an autocephalous church whereas the Constantinopolitan document shares social tasks in dialogue with partners, advising counsels and includes self-criticism. The ROC document attempts to regulate the process of individual deification and transfiguration and transformation of society by an absolute divine law under the leadership of the ROC. The “Social Ethos” does not look to the Church but to the eucharistic community in relationship with other churches to transform the world with the support by individuals. Heta Huskainen does not explicitly criticize the shortcomings of the ROC document in the manner of Rev. Benjamin Novik in his “Analysis of ‘The Fundamentals of Social Conception of the Russian Orthodox Church’” in the October 2002 issue of OPREE.

² It seems odd to this author to use the word “independent” when speaking either ecclesiastically or nationally in the context of autocephaly. Since the Orthodox Church is “one,” it would seem that the Orthodox Churches are interdependent and only self-governing.

Part II: Conceptualizations

[PM] Regina Elsner, “Towards an Orthodox Social Ethics? Socio-Ethical Negotiations in Ukrainian Orthodoxy,” (pp. 97-130)

Regina Elsner, Researcher at the Centre for Eastern European and International Studies in Berlin, contrasts the Muscovite and Constantinopolitan models of social ethics stating that the two collide in Ukraine. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) represents the ROC model. The Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which received its autocephaly from the Patriarch of Constantinople, published the Ukrainian translation of the “Social Concept” but with some changes. However, after the Euro-Maidan Revolution of Dignity it disseminated the “Social Ethos” which reflects interaction with modern developments and addresses itself not only to the government but primarily to the people, The OCU also reflects some influence of the Ukrainian Council of Churches and other public religious institutions. After the Russian invasion the ROC “Social Concept” has lost much of its influence.

[PM] Kathy Rousselet, “The Russian Orthodox Church and the *Russkii Mir*.” (pp. 131-144)

Kathy Rousselet, Research Professor at the Centre de recherches internationales in Paris, begins with the many meanings of the concept “*Russkii Mir*.” It is a post-secular rhetoric which contrasts Western universal globalization with multipolar civilizations based on local traditions. By 2007 *Russkii Mir* was not merely an ideology but an institutionalized foundation which propagates Russian language, religion, culture, and history, i.e. Russianness—a feeling of belonging to Russian culture and civilization. By 2018 *Russkii Mir* became identified with the canonical territory of the ROC and the Russian nation was presented as a global nation. Thus, the concept has been diversified and now is both a territorial and international concept. ROC is both a national church as well as a defender of traditional values globally. Rousselet concludes that it is less important what *Russkii Mir* means than what actions are undertaken in its name.

[PM] Alfons Brüning, “‘Kyivan Christianity’ and the ‘Churches of the Kyivan Tradition’: Concept of the Distinctiveness of Christianity in Ukraine before and after 2019.” (pp. 145-162)

Alfons Brüning, Chair of “Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Human Rights, Peace Studies at PThU in Amsterdam, notes the search for characteristics of Ukrainian Orthodoxy distinct from Russian Orthodoxy that coincided with the independence movement. The chapter offers a detailed discussion of the many attempts to define the essence of “Kyivan Christianity” throughout the centuries that would embody both Eastern and Western traditions. The process was very complex; in some way both inclusive and dissociative elements which emerged due to Ukrainian incorporation into the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and Austrian, and Russian empires.

III. Ecclesiological Issues

[PC] Nicholas Denysenko, “Conciliarity in Ukrainian Orthodoxy,” (pp.173-192)

In this chapter, Nicholas Denysenko, professor at Valparaiso University in Indiana, looks at the concept of conciliarity, *sobornopravnist*, as it relates to Orthodoxy after the Bolshevik Revolution and into the period when Ukraine was incorporated into the Soviet Union. The definition of conciliarity was an issue of who would be allowed to participate in the governance of the church. Would it be bishops only, or would clergy and laity be included? Some of the conflict

surrounding conciliarity, and the way in which the various Orthodox Churches were lobbying for power, occurred as some of the Orthodox began to lobby for autocephaly. There were several players in this series of conflicts, both ecclesial and political. For a time the UAOC (Ukrainian Auto Orthodox Church) was a leading body in the shifting set of church bodies.

All of this discussion took place with the background of the battle for independence from one side and the imposition of Soviet power on the other. The development of conciliarity was swallowed up in the eventual victory of Soviet power.

[PC] Ioan Moga, “Synodality as Syncephaly? A Plea for a Pastoral-Participative Renewal of the Pan-Orthodox Practice of Synodality,” (pp. 193-209)

In this chapter Ioan Moga, Assistant Professor for Theology (Systematic) at the Faculty for Roman Catholic Theology, University of Vienna, looks for the operation of Orthodox synodality as a means of dealing with crises. He mentions first that Pope Francis is looking to this concept as a way for Roman Catholic and Orthodox dialogue. Moga also call on the ancient historical concept of synodality as *the* way of dealing with canonical and theological conflict.

The lament is that the more a synodical approach to conflict within Orthodoxy in the modern world is absolutely necessary, the more that competing jurisdictions are unable to use it as a means by which reconciliation could be achieved. He grants that synodical processes are still useful. Moga gives example in the 2006 dialogue in Ravenna between Catholic and Orthodox are “at least a beautiful desideratum.” (p. 196) He also gives the historical development of the Romanian Church as an example of the work of synodality *within* an Orthodox jurisdiction. In contrast, there is the issue of *primatization*, whereby the head (primate) of an autocephalous church gathers power to himself. This also has consequences for cooperation at the higher levels.

Moga also writes about political issues becoming involved in the conflicts of the church. He quotes Dumitru Staniloae in order to show a way around some of the issues that have overwhelmed Orthodox unity: “In the Church, the extended mystery-body of Christ, although the natural diversity of persons and nations is not abolished, the inner unity of humanity as a whole is restored and extended, freeing it from the contradictions that came through the Fall.” (p. 205)

[PC] Evgeny Pilipenko, “The Idea of ‘Unity’ in Orthodoxy,” (pp. 209-235)

Evgeny Pilipenko’s idea of unity within Orthodoxy is to enforce a rigid Orthodoxy, to which believers must subscribe in order to be in unity with other believers among the Orthodox Churches. This article does not meet the standards that other scholars have exhibited in this collection.

[PC] Nadieszda Kizenko, “Contemporary Liturgical Practices in the UOC and OCU and their implication.” (pp. 237-258)

Nadieszda Kizenko, Professor of Russian History, University at Albany, begins her chapter by invoking the rule of “*lex orandi, lex credendi*” as a way of organizing her writing on the two churches in question, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. She is primarily concerned with the way in which liturgical texts are used, especially comparing Russian and Ukrainian, as well as Russian text used in Ukraine, for identifying the issues that are important to the various Ukrainian church jurisdictions, both Orthodox and Catholic.

Part of the discussion involves the way in which contemporary bishops and patriarchs are,

or are not prayed for. Also important are the lists of saints that have been added or dropped from lists in these churches are important. Alexander Nevsky, for example, has been omitted from various Ukrainian lists.

[PC] Sergii Bortnyk, “Church and Exclusivism in Ukrainian Orthodoxy.” (pp. 259-285)

In this essay, Sergii Bortnyk is looking at the relations of three Orthodox Churches, UOC (in union with the Moscow Patriarchate), UOC Kyiv Patriarchate, Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and one Eastern Rite Catholic Church, Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, in Ukraine. In 2019, the UOC Kyiv Patriarchate and Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church were recognized by the Patriarch of Constantinople as the “Orthodox Church of Ukraine.” By “exclusivism” Bortnyk is looking at the relations, mainly of the three Orthodox Churches and whether or not they proclaim the other Churches in Ukraine as schismatic and not worthy of being considered in communion.

It would be interesting now, after the year of war after the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, to have statistics as to the preference of the Ukrainian people for which Orthodox Church they favor. The behavior of the Russian invaders and the Russian state, as well as the pronouncements of the Orthodox Church of Russia may have made for fewer adherents to the Church that is attached to the Russian Church. It would have been helpful for this essay to have had some sort of chart or diagram to the relationships of the Churches. This would have enhanced the detail of the chapter.

[PM] Lydia Lazarova and Tetiana Kolanychenko, “The Role of the Laity: Some Observations from the Inside.” (pp. 287-301)

The authors attempt to gauge the role of the laity amidst jurisdictional and political claims. Lacking reliable data, the two authors depend on six acquaintances who are intellectual activists. The sample is much too small to get truly dependable data. The lay people are generally too passive, waiting for bishops and priests to tell them what to do. However, lay people mostly organize specific projects.

[PM] Pavlo Smytsiyuk, “The New Orthodox Church in Ukraine: Ecumenical Aspects and Problems.” (pp. 303-332)

The reception of autocephaly within Ukraine is mostly positive (especially by the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church), except by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). As of 2014 both the Kievan Patriarchate and Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church merged into Orthodox Church of Ukraine which sought ecumenical contacts in religiously pluralistic Ukraine, but their relationship with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) was bad. The Orthodox Church of Ukraine was not experienced ecumenically but looked forward to contacts with the World Council of Churches; membership in it needs consensus of all WCC members. Which is an obstacle to inclusion of the Ukrainian churches. The Roman Catholic Church did not take a formal position toward OCU. The conflict between the Patriarchates of Constantinople and Moscow had a negative impact on dialogue. The war forces all to take sides and seek new arrangements which provides a challenge not only for Ukraine but also the wider world.

[PC] Thomas Bremer, “New Approaches in Ecclesiology? Reflections Induced by the Ukrainian Crisis,” (pp. 334-348)

Thomas Bremer, professor of theology at the University of Münster, in this chapter, takes a look at the ecclesiological issues from both a historical and a contemporary view. He begins with a discussion of the ancient church in which a territorial episcopate is the norm, and which harkens back to the First Nicene Council. The assumption that there should be one bishop in one city (or other geographical entity) is the prevailing canonical reality. Bremer says that this was as much a way of keeping heretics and their bishops from organizing rival dioceses within a city.

Bremer dwells on the history and reality of autocephaly by which national and ethnically defined churches are established. He sees this as a more modern problem in Orthodoxy. He might have also explored the claims to ancient autocephalies, particularly by the Orthodox Church in Georgia, that celebrates the establishment of autocephaly during the time of the ruler Vaxtang in the fourth and fifth centuries. While certainly this relationship of the Georgian Church to Orthodox Christianity is not founded in the modern, post-Byzantine sense, the modern churches claim to a much more ancient autocephaly should, at the very least, be mentioned.

Bremer writes that the modern Eucharistic ecclesiology as promoted by Afanasiev and Zizioulos should be the basis for a modern Orthodox ecclesiology based on the local church’s relationship of bishop, priest, and congregation. A more provocative suggestion by Bremer is that the territorial based ecclesiology should be replaced.

IV. Church, State, and Society

[PC] Elena A. Stepanova, “The Place of the Church in Society: Provider of a Moral Code,” (pp. 353-377)

The author of this chapter, Elena Stepanova, Principal Research Fellow, Institute of Philosophy and Law, Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Ekaterinburg, is someone I would like to engage in conversation now that the Russian Federation has spent a year of murder and mayhem in its invasion of Ukraine. I find it beyond disturbing that the accused war criminal Vladimir Putin is cited on the Orthodox Church’s role as a moral agent, “...it is crucial that the Russian Orthodox Church [...] constantly focuses on the issues of the moral health of society.” (p. 354) The Orthodox Church in Russia, particularly in the person of Patriarch Kirill, has maintained a position of sycophancy instead of *Symphonia*.

It is interesting to read of the way in which Orthodoxy in Russia is more concerned with the collective than with individuals. Stepanova makes positive comparisons between Soviet ethics and post-Soviet Orthodox ethics. In a way, she is correct especially given the brutality of the war against Ukraine.

[PC] Aristotle Papanikolau, “The Ascetical as the Civic: Civil Society as Political Communion,” (pp.382-396)

Aristotle Papanikolau, Professor of Theology at Fordham University, wants to move away from the concept of *symphonia* and replace it with a eucharist-centered ecclesiology that ultimately forgoes nationalism and ethnicity as being part of the definition of Orthodox ecclesiology. The eucharistic ecclesiology, drawing on the writings of Nicholas Afanasiev, is one that seeks confessional unity in the bishop, priest, and people that is realized at the Eucharist. Also, of course,

is the presence of Christ in the body and blood.

From this Papanikolau moves to the idea that *theosis* and ascetical practice are derived from the Eucharist. From this vantage, he believes that Orthodox can more honestly move into an experience of civil society within a nation and need not fear people of other denominations or faiths in this context. Power is to be ceded, but this gives the individual Orthodox Christian and the larger Orthodox community the authority to work within a pluralistic and democratic society. This, he believes, is a much better starting point than trying to overcome the authority of other actors within the civil society.

[PC] Nathaniel Wood, “Church and State in Orthodox Christianity.” (pp. 397-417)

Nathaniel Wood has divided ideas about church-state relationship into two large categories: 1. Highlighted by the “stateless church” that is headed by the Patriarch of Constantinople; and 2. that is characterized by a church within a state, as the Orthodox Church in Russia exists and forms relationship with the Russian Federation. The stateless Church, largely in this chapter, is the Patriarchate of Constantinople. With the lack of an Orthodox State, with which to relate, this Church, with most of its constituents outside of Turkey, has a concept of church-state relations that focuses on the way in which the Orthodox Church can be a church that encourages moral and ethical behavior on the part of its members. The Church in state, in this article, like the Orthodox Church in Russia, is one that has a much closer and more intimate relationship with the state. This is a more traditional arrangement and has its roots more clearly in the past. Mr. Wood gives some history to the concept of *symphonia* as related to the Eastern Roman Empire, but, for the length of the article, does not go into a great detail about how that worked in real time. I would tend to be more skeptical than Mr. Wood about how it worked and would like to have known a few more details. The conflicts, thinking first of the battles of John Chrysostom with the royal family of Constantinople, would be a profound contradiction to the idea of *symphonia*.

I would like to ask Mr. Wood whether his mind has been changed about the uses of *symphonia* since the start of the Russian onslaught against the nation of Ukraine and its people. In this reviewer’s opinion, the role that the Orthodox Church in Russia has supported the utter brutality of Putin and his army has weakened the concept so badly that there is almost no way to revive the concept as this ugly war has passed its first anniversary.

[PC] Adalberto Mainardi, “Afterword”

Mr. Mainardi gives a brief synopsis of some of the articles in the book. This is written after the invasion of Ukraine, so he writes a bit about the current situation. What I find disappointing is that even at this date there is insufficient awareness of how the Orthodox Church in Russia may be destroying Orthodox Christianity altogether. This is not only in terms of the faith and minds of the Orthodox believers everywhere, but also in the minds and hearts of those who consider Christian Orthodoxy to be a bleached fossil not worthy of consideration.

Brief Conclusion

Both reviewers agree that this volume is of great importance in understanding the present-day convulsions and crises between the Eastern Orthodox Churches. It is not surprising that there are some chapters that are flawed but most of them are written by some of the most competent and

knowledgeable experts in the field. The three editors succeeded in demonstrating that there are, indeed, two very distinct manifestations of being Orthodox that are rivals for the souls of Orthodox believers. We recommend it to all university and theological libraries.