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Ramet's "Cross and Commissar" - Book Review

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Book Review

Pedro Ramet, *Cross and Commissar* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987),
244 pp.

Readers of *OPREE* will find the new book by Pedro Ramet to be quite helpful. It exhibits thorough research. The extensive footnotes and the selected bibliography themselves are a very valuable resource. But also significant is the unique approach taken to church-state relations in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

In this study the author is not presenting a country-by-country analysis such as the one provided in Trevor Beeson's *Discretion and Valour* (2nd ed., Westminster, 1982). Rather he is applying social science tools and concepts in theorizing about church state interaction. In his view western scholarship on the subject has tended to be rather untheoretical and has often downplayed the complexity of the relationship.

The introductory chapters in Part I deal firstly with religion and modernization and secondly with religion and nationalism. In dealing with religion and nationalism the author takes into his purview all of Eastern Europe; thus this chapter is the most comprehensive one in the book. It should be noted that it appeared first in a book edited by Ramet entitled *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics* (1984). For Communist governments the religious question (i.e. the liquidation of religion) is closely linked with the resolution of the national question (i.e. with ethnic homogenization).

As the author sees it, the Communist religious policy is determined by at least six important factors: (1) the size of the religious organization in question; (2) the organizations's disposition to subordination; (3) the question of allegiance to a foreign authority; (4) the loyalty-disloyalty of the body during World War II; (5) the ethnic configuration of the respective country; and (6) the dominant political culture of the country. Applying these principles Ramet finds that the most persecuted have been the Uniates and the Jews. Orthodox have been most frequently coopted, while Catholics and Muslims have been most often tolerated. Exceptions are pointed out with reasons given.

In Part II the author takes a different approach. In each chapter he is applying a particular sociological concept to a particular religion in a particular country or area. In some the application is done with greater clarity and thoroughness than in others.

Social function theory is applied rather briefly to religion in the Soviet Union. Using the method called geneticism-monism he makes a thorough comparison of religion and national culture in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The chapter on Church and Peace in German Democratic Republic is

presumably applying the political culture approach. However, this is not made clear in the chapter. One has to read the conclusion of the book to find out what method is being used here.

Very thorough is the chapter on factionalism in the Croatian church-state relationship in Yugoslavia. The author points out that most writers seem to be unaware of the factions within both church and state. What is truly amazing is the page-and-one-half-long footnote listing the articles and books which operate on the misconception of unity within the church and within the state. Readers of *OPREE* will want to look at this account to see if their writings appear there. There is also a shorter list of writers who recognize diversity in the church but not in the state. Lists are very short for those who recognize diversity in the state but not in the church, and for those who recognize diversity in both. Having pointed this out the author depicts the diversity within both church and state in Croatia. He concludes that the factional model illuminates several related facets of what is shown to be a complex relationship.

Using organization theory he examines Bulgarian and Serbian Orthodox churches. In Bulgaria, where religious policy is highly centralized, the church has been more successfully coopted for government purposes than in Yugoslavia where it is decentralized.

Part III of the book takes a different approach. It gives an account of developments in the region since 1978. There has been increased religious ferment accompanied by increased religious persecution. Much credit for the ferment is given to the Polish pope and to Polish Catholicism. Elsewhere in Europe church-state relations in this period fall into three patterns: siege (Czechoslovakia, Lithuania, and Ukraine); *modus vivendi* (Hungary, the GDR, and Yugoslavia) and cooptation (Romania, Bulgaria, and Russia). Developments in each of these countries are summarized. Some attention is devoted to the plot to kill the pope. The author sees a worsening of church-state relationships in countries other than East Germany.

In his conclusion to this chapter Ramet states that "it is also evident that the Communist policy of religious persecution has, if anything, backfired, fueling religious ferment. In political terms, it is evident that the party's organizational monopoly naturally encourages the sole independent institution, the church, to become involved in political and quasi-political questions and that religious revival therefore strengthens the form of opposition to Communist rule."

Part IV entitled "Theoretical Considerations" provides conclusions to the book. If the reader has been wondering what the varied approaches add up to, the answer is provided in the conclusion. Here the author points out the fallacies in various writings on church-state relations and summarizes for the reader the different models that have been described in the book. He points out that one cannot use all the models at once. That would require a multi-volume series.

Ramet has made an important contribution in this book. He has presented a convincing argument for the use of social science models. He himself recognizes that this method supplements but does not replace other methods. Surely we will continue to need works that focus on ideology, theology, and history.

For example, in the chapter on East Germany a historical perspective would have helped to avoid the generalization that Catholics tend to accept secular authority and Protestants tend to protest. This ignores the Lutheran tradition of acceptance of secular authority. A theological perspective would show that East German Protestant activity has been influenced by the thought of Bonhoeffer and the Confessing Church.

It would also be helpful to apply in this chapter the factional model proposed in another chapter. There is considerable diversity in the East German churches regarding enthusiastic support for the independent peace movement. Peace groups have been far more active in the cities than in the villages. Also the enthusiasm has varied in time, being greater before NATO stationed new missiles in western Germany than afterwards.

Since this book does not claim to be comprehensive, one cannot perhaps criticize it on these grounds, but it does leave gaps. One learns little about the status of Protestantism in other countries besides East Germany.

One wonders if it is correct to list so many writers on Eastern Europe as unaware of the diversity within church and state. For example, it is correct to put Trevor Beeson's book on that list?

The varied approaches used in the different parts of the book could be confusing to the reader. There might be some value in reading the conclusion before reading the rest of the book.

We will be hearing more from Pedro Ramet who is now editing a three-volume series on church-state relations among Orthodox, Roman Catholics, and Protestants in Eastern Europe. We can expect that this series will use some of the models proposed in this book.

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