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Review of Murzaku's "Monasticism in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Republics"

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Ines Angeli Murzaku, ed., *Monasticism in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Republics*, (Routledge Religion, Society and Government in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet States), New York: Routledge, 2016, pp. xiv + 403, hardcover, ISBN: 978-0-415-81959-6, \$179, varies.

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Professor Murzaku fills a significant void in her recent marvelous collection of essays on the role of monasticism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet states. Part I addresses monasticism in East Central Europe (ECE) and the Balkans while Part II focuses on the four former Soviet republics (FSR) in which Christianity was a dominant tradition--- Russia, Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine. For Murzaku, monasteries can serve not simply by preserving national and ethnic identity, as they have historically, but also by becoming a vehicle for ecumenical hospitality beyond their borders and fostering further dialogue. The seventeen essays following her introduction examine monasteries socio-politically, historically, theologically, and ecclesiologically often with attention to early monastic texts. The contributing authors, themselves, represent distinct specializations: historians, international relations scholars, political scientist, philosopher, comparative religion professor, and, of course, theologians, including a liturgist. They all provide us with excellent parenthetical notes and bibliographies of the most current works, as well as traditional primary sources. While these are scholarly introductions to specific ethnic monasteries, they focus around a particular theme, often how monasticism contributed to national identity. Russia merits three more specific pieces, including one dealing with the New Jerusalem Palestinian monastery.

An excellent introduction of fifteen pages sets the tone of the work and offers a concise synopsis of each chapter. Not all topics will appeal to all readers and one can thus pick and choose what to read. Murzaku engages modern and contemporary scholars, novelists, and

biographers, all from various disciplines familiar to most. Many are parenthetically noted and all works are arranged alphabetically in the chapter bibliography, beginning with two significant commentators, Anne Applebaum and Anders Aslund. From theological and ecclesiological perspectives, Murzaku argues that East and West share a common heritage and need each other so that, to use John Paul II's image, "Christianity can breathe with both lungs." In her words, the Church of the Gentiles is the Church of all nations encompassing East and West. What was present in the first millennium remained even after the Protestant Reformation as "their cultures and traditions were receptive and reciprocal" (1). Western monasticism has always depended on the Eastern. The tradition of the East makes it clear that the monasteries, undergoing some revival as the contributors indicate, are in a real sense, the soul of the Church. Monasticism can therefore, for the editor, contribute to the unity of the Churches. She uses the image of monastic hospitality, quoting the first line of Chapter 53 of Benedict's rule that "All guests are to be received as guests (sic)" (5). The typo obviously is not as strong as the actual text: "All guests are to be received as Christ" (*The Rule of St. Benedict in English*, Liturgical Press, 1981). Be that as it may, her points on hospitality and receptivity are well taken, for as Murzaku argues, "monks and religious orders were constantly in dialogue with culture . . . culture came to the cloister and then radiated outside the cloister in nuanced scholarship" (5).

None of this denies, as one can find in the essays, that monasticism in CEE and FSR are susceptible to nationalism and ethnic politics. Monks have been and can continue to be promoters of division and schism. Among the most known of these are the monks on Mount Athos. For, as Graham Speake observes, while non-Greek houses are no longer Hellenized and pan-Orthodoxy and autonomy are accepted, Athonites still find their identity in defending Orthodoxy in its purist form (149). How one balances purity with communion has not been

resolved. To be sure, this is also true in Western monasticism as Gorniak-Kocikowska points out in the Polish case, where monks and nuns historically saw as one of their goals to preserve "the souls of the Polish people for Catholicism and to defend this religion against pagans, Eastern Orthodox Christians and Muslims" (168). For those new to consecrated religious life in Eastern Europe, one may need to note that when one speaks of monks and nuns, they include active orders on the Western model, not just those in monasteries.

Given my own experience with monasteries in Slovakia, Ukraine and Poland, I found those essays particularly interesting. While the Second Slovak Republic only came to be in 1993, Stanley Kirschbaum's sole English treatment of the subject fills an incredible lack, for, as he argues, what we know of Slovak monasticism "allows us to envisage some aspects and the extent of their involvement in the life of the local population" (81). This contributed to the entire nation through the maintenance of regional culture and language. In Albania, the world's first officially atheist state, monasteries, as in Slovakia and Poland, were clearly a mosaic of communities that were Western in orientation. Romania, on the other hand, despite areas populated by Protestants and Greco-Catholics, preserved Orthodoxy. For Antonio D'Alessandri, the Orthodox can move forward and engage "the effort for ecumenical dialogue in order to bring religious plurality within the sphere of values that constitute the heritage of national identity, breaking the ambiguous union between state and church, between religious identity and national identity" (186). Given my own, albeit limited, experience of Romanian diaspora communities and the Romanian Orthodox Church, I am less confident about how this may work. Daniel Galadza, in an almost dictionary entry form essay, offers us an excellent piece on another area where Greco-Catholics were persecuted, Ukraine. Galadza rightly notes that Metropolitan Andriy Sheptytsky, as Rutsky before him, "never imagined a new 'order'" (387). However, in

reality, Western model religious orders still dominate in "Catholic in communion" Ukraine. In Ukraine, one finds a missionary service to the church, a strong sense of national identity, a commitment to ritual and liturgy, and a renewed desire for unity between East and West. As I see Eastern Catholic Churches as bridges rather than obstacles to unity, I believe the UGCC is a great gift to *ecclesia ex gentibus*.

Monasticism in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Republics is a *must have* for scholars in the area. I know of no other work available in English that details monasticism in ECE and FSR in an inter-disciplinary forum with attention to both Orthodox and Catholic expressions of monastic life. The introduction alone may be worth the price of the text, if not for its hefty cost. Despite that, all theological and university libraries ought to have a copy for reference, in addition to those who research and teach in the areas of Eastern Christianity, ecumenism, spirituality and ecclesiology. A colloquium on the themes presented by many of the authors would foster further exploration of the ecumenical hospitality that Murzaku hopes for. Most scholars in the areas noted may be acquainted with only some of the authors and monastic traditions. This allows a pick-and-choose option for students, which is how I intend to use it. I highly recommend this text.