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ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN RENEWAL MOVEMENTS IN EASTERN EUROPE,
EDS., ALEKSANDRA DJURIĆ MILOVANOVIĆ & RADMILA RADIĆ,
CHARIS: CHRISTIAN & RENEWAL INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES, 2017, 345 p.

Reviewed by Marko Galić*

The edited volume *Orthodox Christian Renewal Movements in Eastern Europe* represents a unique contribution to both regional and Eastern European academic literature in the field of religious studies. The first reason for that is the topic to which the volume is dedicated: Orthodox Christian renewal movements in Eastern Europe, a research field that has generally received very little attention in the past, which certainly led to the widespread opinion that religious reforms took place only in the Western part of the continent. Another reason is the structure of the papers, their methodology and authors, which represent a unique combination of different approaches and methods – sociological, anthropological, historical, philosophical and others, written by authors from different countries, analyzing not only different movements, but also different aspects of the same movements, with the aim of providing a detailed insight into how, why, and under what conditions and historical circumstances these movements began to emerge, what their characteristics and differences were in relation to the established religious orthodoxy, to what extent their members were different from other believers, and, ultimately, how they disappeared or transformed into something else.

The introductory part presents a fairly general historiographical overview of the unfavorable situation in which the Orthodox churches in the East found themselves under the occupation of foreign powers, primarily the Ottoman Empire (the Balkans) and the Mongol Empire (Russia), which led to a sense of “moral superiority” among their members, who, unlike Christians in the West, suffered for their faith.

These churches managed to avoid liberalization for a long time but, when in

the second half of the 19th century, various Protestant missionaries from a very diverse range of Protestant denominations began arriving in Eastern Europe and doing missionary work, traditional Orthodox churches faced a very different way of professing the faith, to which each of them reacted differently. From this encounter with reformist-inspired religious communities, on the one hand, and traditional Orthodox churches, on the other, various reformist movements began to emerge within the Orthodox world with the goal of changing the things they were not happy with.

The papers are divided into three categories. The first category includes works on the renewal movements that appeared in Russia, the Soviet Union and Ukraine. Here we get an insight into some key renewal movements that emerged within the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). One of them is, of course, the movement of the “Old Believers”, which arose as a reaction to the reforms introduced by Patriarch Nikon in 1650, which brought changes in performing rituals, using three instead of two fingers, pronouncing the name of Jesus, and some other things. As James White notes, inspired by the teachings of the Old Believers, Russian theologian Ian Verkovsky emerged as one of many critics of the ROC during the 19th century, proposing necessary reforms to the church’s episcopal governance, a greater role of believers in decision-making, strict decentralization and greater freedom in performing rituals. Thanks to Svetlana Inkova’s text, we see that criticism

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often came from the intelligentsia, as was the case with the so-called “Tolstoyans”, a group of authors and thinkers centered on Leo Tolstoy, who spread their ideas among previously established religious communities including the spiritualists, Molokans, Stundists, and Baptists, sought to realize their idea of fundamental change in both ROC as a religious community and Russia as a state. From the intense contact between Tolstoy’s supporters and some groups of Russian spiritualists emerged a new syncretistic-religious renewal movement, called the “Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood”. Various renewal movements that began to appear in Russia, both as a product of foreign missions and as a reaction of the local population, also began to spread to the surrounding territories. Thus, a peculiar form of the Stundist evangelical movement emerged among Ukrainian pious people, later influencing the teachings of the reformer Kondrat Maliovanyi and his millennial movement.

In the second part of the volume, we are introduced to the renewal movements that emerged in Serbia. Here the focus is on two movements, namely “The Nazarenes” and “The God Worshipper Movement”. From the paper of Bojan Aleksov, we learn that the Nazarene communities during the second half of the 19th century began to spread throughout Hungary, the Habsburg Monarchy and the Kingdom of Serbia – especially Vojvodina. Although there were no conflicts between the Serbian clergy and the Nazarenes in the beginning, tensions began to arise after religious conversion became common. These tensions rarely came from church leaders, but from parish priests who cited the domestic intelligentsia and Western influence as the key reasons for frequent conversions and very rarely referred to perhaps more objective factors such as the low level of education among priests, their tendency to charge the locals for officiating baptisms, weddings, burials, as well as the general decline of the people

accompanied by the shameful religious life of the “believers”, empty churches, unattractive services, inebriation among the clergy and immorality. Radmila Radić and Aleksandra Djurić-Milovanović seem to be continuing the story that Aleksov started. As a reaction to the mentioned “external” and “internal” problems that the Serbian Orthodox Church was facing, as well as various wars, religious crises, modernity, materialism, liberalism, socialism and current trends, a local religious movement was formed among the pious rural population, the so-called God Worshipper Movement, to which the Serbian Orthodox Church had a rather ambivalent attitude, but it is indisputable that, as Dragana Radisavljević-Ćiparizović writes, this movement was a kind of renewal movement that influenced the very form of confession of faith among the people.

In the third and final part of the volume, the authors deal with the renewal movements that emerged within the Romanian, Greek and Bulgarian Orthodox Churches. In the first part of this section, we encounter a paper by Corneliu Constantineanu on the movement called the “Lord’s Army”, which, in a parallel with a number of neo-Protestant communities such as Pentecostals, Baptists and the Brethren appeared in Romania in the early 20th century in response to the absence of the Gospel in the everyday lives of believers. We can further see how the semi-monastic movement “Zoe” appeared as a product of a series of 19th-century movements that emerged in Greece with the aim of church renewal, at the beginning of the 20th century, more precisely in 1907. Amaryllyis Logotheti describes how this movement, which emerged in a very turbulent period in Greek history and which some considered to be deeply inspired by Protestant reformist ideas, was in many ways similar to the movements presented by the other authors, especially when it comes to spiritual growth in accordance with the Orthodox faith, as well as the spread of Orthodoxy through missionary activities, humanitarian

work and religious instruction in a historical context marked by urbanization, secularization, Marxism and major social crises.

Thanks to the last paper, we get an insight into the way in which the Bulgarian Orthodox Church sought to expand its influence in society after the World War I. This key role was primarily played by the people from the magazine *Christiyanka*, around which various organizations were concentrated, with the White Cross probably the most notable one among them. Although the contents of the magazine and its editorial board changed during its existence, the texts it published and the work of organizations close to it reveal an insistence on so-called "pactical religiosity," which means fostering charity, good deeds, and generally making a contribution to the community, as well as condemning post-war modernism by calling for a return to Bulgaria's glorious past and traditional religious values.

Although the works presented in this volume are quite diverse, in the sense that they deal with either different movements or different elements of the same one, we can see several common characteristics of all the renewal movements described. It should certainly be noted that they almost always appeared in difficult times, most often during wars or social crises. Second, these movements usually arose during times when the church was facing some "threats," such as modernism, missionary activities of other religious communities, communism, atheism, secularism, liberalism or a decline of religiosity, so as such they could be characterized as movements that emerged as a response to internal and external threatening factors. Thirdly, we see that these movements were somehow always trying to change the current state of the church, which is why they are called renewal movements.

Finally, it is important to note that this volume is a very good source of information concerning Orthodox renewal movements, and the papers presented in it offer plenty of references useful for upcoming research.

As such, this volume is intended for a fairly wide range of researchers from various disciplines, but also for the Orthodox believers and members of different religious communities who would like to get acquainted with the different currents that emerged throughout history within their communities. From all of the above, it can be concluded that this volume is a notable contribution to our knowledge of a topic that, at least in Eastern Europe, tends to attract relatively little attention.

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