

plain the particularities of Russian Neo-Paganism in comparison with its Western analogues. Shnirelman's conclusions also derive from a well-defined source base. The ethno-racial attitudes and political radicalism of the most active Russian Neo-Pagans (*rodnovery*), and those most noticed by the media, cannot be ignored, and Shnirelman's study provides full and convincing confirmation of this. For a comprehensive picture of different versions of Neo-Paganism a wider research program is needed, the directions for which are indicated within *Russian Rodnoverie* itself.

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**Alexey Sitnikov (2012). *Orthodox Christianity and the Institutions of Power and Civil Society in Russia. (Pravoslavie, instituty vlasti i grazhdanskogo obshchestva v Rossii)*. St. Petersburg: Aleteiia (in Russian). — 248 pages.**

Alexey Sitnikov's book, which is based on his doctoral dissertation, is devoted to "an analysis of Orthodoxy's influence on the molding of the institutions of power in Russian society, its structural stratification, and the emergence

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of a civil society" (9). It is one of this country's first comprehensive and systematized studies of this issue. Drawing on an extensive literature and a variety of historical sources, Sitnikov analyzes works by Russian and foreign scholars, and demonstrates the contradictions in, and the tendencies of, the development of church-society and church-state relations.

There is no doubt as to the timeliness of a study of this kind. Assuming one agrees with Sitnikov that Russian society has in recent years been undergoing a process of sociopolitical transformation whose endgame is the gradual formation of democratic institutions and the development of a civil society, this automatically prompts one to ask how Orthodox Christianity as a cultural tradition and the Russian Orthodox Church as the largest and most influential religious communion have impacted that process. Does Orthodoxy inherently possess the resources to ease these transformations, or is it, by virtue of its historical, doctrinal, and other particular traits, doomed to do the opposite—to slow and hamper democratic development? In a certain sense, this question may be seen as part of a more general problem concerning the compatibility of religion and political modernity, at least insofar as the latter affects the desacralization of power, the dehierarchization of society's structure, the development of horizontal mechanisms of self-organization, and so forth.

The book's first chapter deals with theoretical issues and research methodology. Sitnikov has chosen to employ the approaches and conceptual apparatus of religious studies used in Europe and the United States. His assumption is that the methods for the

study of religion and its influence on the institutions of power and civil society developed by Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, and Pitirim Sorokin, as well as Peter Berger, Pierre Bourdieu, and Jürgen Habermas, may be usefully enlisted and applied to Russian reality. Leaning especially on Bourdieu's ideas and terminology, he crafts a model for Orthodoxy's influence on the framing of social reality, the production of a legitimate vision of the social world, and the legitimization and grounding of power.

It is, however, impossible to overlook an evident lacuna in Sitnikov's theory and methodology, namely, that he makes virtually no attempt to adapt Western constructs to the realities of Russia. For example, it is not enough to describe, as Sitnikov does in his chapter "The Unique Features of the Religious Situation in Russian Society," Berger's "religious marketplace" and "pluralization" or Habermas's "postsecular society," and then conclude that "using the conceptual apparatus they developed to describe the religious situation in Russia enables us to uncover substantial idiosyncrasies in the position of various denominations, church-state relations, and the religious conduct of the people at large" (29–30). Those concepts need, rather, to be operationalized to Russia's specific realities. Can the reli-

gious situation in Russia really be described through the idiom of the “religious marketplace”? Are we really dealing here with “pluralization” in the Western sense? Can we speak of the coming together of a “postsecular society” in Russia in the same sense of the term as used by Habermas? That these questions are left altogether unaddressed detracts somewhat from the value of the chapter on theory and methodology.

Sitnikov then embarks on a systematic analysis of Orthodox Christianity’s influence, past and present, on the formation of institutions of power. But his diagnosis, as a supporter of democratic transformations, is bleak, since to him, Orthodoxy offers society a model for the religious legitimization of a power structure that is characterized by monocentrism and the sacralization of power relations. This ties in to the fact that prior to 1917, the Russian Orthodox Church was one with the state and conceptualized its position and its relations with the power structure accordingly. The categories of Orthodox social teaching were predominantly based on borrowings from Byzantine thought, which could brook none of the distinction between state and society that became established in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The ideal of the sacralized, noncompetitive, and stringently

hierarchical model of governance was traditionally inherent in Russian Orthodoxy, which affirmed this model as ordained by God. Such, in fact, is the institutional order supported by the Church’s social teaching today. Orthodoxy’s social ideals do not encompass democracy, a civil society, or a competitive political culture, in conformity with the Church’s unwritten laws, which have formed over many centuries in a system that assumed the existing system of power and the specific vehicles of that power to be heaven-sent, just and unchangeable.

Sitnikov reaches the important conclusion that the Orthodox model of the social order is increasingly evidently running counter to the gathering sociopolitical transformations of Russian society. Drawing on data from a variety of studies, he demonstrates that socioeconomic development in Russia over recent years has given rise to a middle class with its own intrinsically independent economic behavior, values, and political demands. Although concentrated in the major cities and not presently dominant, the middle class is even now becoming an important force in society. This is depriving the paternalist political culture of its monopoly and is producing the prerequisites for a democratic culture. The values of self-expression are beginning to push back against the tra-

ditional mindset, and a demand for democracy and a liberal model of interaction between citizen and state is taking shape. As those tendencies develop over time, the traditional political mindset of Orthodoxy is becoming unacceptable for a certain portion of society, above all for representatives of the middle class.

The development of political institutions in the modern world led to the separation of civil society from the state. The state has relinquished control over morality, religion, and culture, while civil society has assumed the regulation of morality and spirituality. The ruler is no longer perceived as a sacral figure chosen by God to lead his subjects to transcendent salvation. The contemporary model for the legitimization of power, rather, strives to desacralize the bearer of supreme power to the fullest extent possible, seeing him as merely a functionary who is regularly supplanted and is accountable to those who elected him. By contrast, the Russian Orthodox Church's proclaimed ideal of symphony between Church and state automatically injects an element of sacrality into the understanding of the supreme power. Only a noncompetitive system of power in need of pseudomonarchical legitimization, however, can have any use for a symphonic model of church-state relations.

From his analysis of the practical relations between state and Church, Sitnikov concludes that in its relations with society, Orthodoxy tends to aspire to reliance on the institutions of power and the invocation of their help and protection. But this practice runs counter to the democratic norms of the modern world, which suppose that a religion's influence depends less on cooperative efforts with the state than on its own position and authority in civil society, and on the degree to which the religious communities within its purview have developed.

Sitnikov goes on to examine the activity of Orthodox parishes and other associations of believers, and their place in the structure of Russia's civil society. Basing his analysis on well-known studies of parish life, he describes various activities in which communities and organizations of believers engage, while noting the persistent notion of the Church as a rigid hierarchical system whose foundational principle is obedience. This explains why the lives of most who define themselves as Orthodox have very little to do with the parish.

Associations of believers, including parishes, are, however, elements of civil society, in which they champion the traditional values of their members and their right to live in accordance

with their convictions. In the modern state, the Church cannot avoid becoming a civil society organization, yet the Church's leadership continues, through inertia, to pursue a close connection with the state. The Church hierarchs deem it unnecessary to develop and support a diverse network of groups and associations created by rank-and-file believers; on the contrary, this is seen as something of a danger to the hierarchy itself. While desirous of building the Church's influence, its leadership is doing less to develop the parishes and associations created by the rank-and-file faithful than to establish contact with representatives of state power. The Church solicits the support of these state representatives on the assumption that the Church's influence is directly proportional to its connection with the state and that only through this power structure can it attain significance (210).

Sitnikov's overall conclusion is grim: Orthodoxy, the path to democratization, and the emergence of civil society are at present incompatible, since Orthodoxy tends to slow and deter development in the institutions of power. Furthermore, he seems to see no way of surmounting that incompatibility, if one discounts certain optimistic and quite unsubstantiated hints to the effect that "the contemporary demo-

catic values that are shared by the middle class will, in all likelihood, be included among the desiderata of a significant segment of the faithful. There is an incipient need for the social doctrine of Orthodoxy to perform a 'one-eighty,' in order to accommodate the preferences of the dominant social group of believers" (148).

I do not, however, propose to debate Sitnikov in this review, since the value of his book ultimately resides in the probing questions it asks and provocative answers it gives. I shall therefore restrict myself to two observations here. The first is that Sitnikov leaves entirely untouched the issue of how much influence Orthodoxy actually exerts on institutions of power, "structural stratification" and the formation of civil society, and the terms in which that influence may be analyzed. As Sitnikov himself observes, Orthodoxy and, for that matter, the extent of a person's piety, have a negligible effect on Russian sociopolitical consciousness (105), other than at a few expressly symbolic junctures—the desire to see an Orthodox president as head of state, for example, or the general disapproval of cultural liberalism. An even remotely meaningful link between religious affiliation and socio-political views is detectable only among strictly observant Russian churchgoers who, according to

Sitnikov's calculations, comprise only some 2 percent of the population. Even certain tendencies he mentions in the direction of a new symphony between state and Church—or rather, to borrow from Mikhail Shakhov (Shakhov 2002: 58–61), toward “synodalization”—are not in themselves evidence of any meaningful exertion of influence (other than of a particular kind of “gift exchange,” in which administrative and financial benefits are proffered in exchange for ideological support).

Second, Sitnikov is inclined to describe Orthodox Christianity and Orthodox Christians as a unified and noncontradictory entity that is, by and large, inclined to disavow any potential socio-political transformations. In so doing, he almost entirely overlooks the existence within Orthodoxy itself of diverse ideological currents and a variety of actors, some of whom are highly sensitive to the challenges that Orthodoxy faces at the present time and who are endeavoring to give the matter the profound consideration it warrants.<sup>5</sup>

I will, however, refrain from further developing these criticisms for now, and will end my review by again pointing up the

5. As an example of an analysis that takes account of the multidimensionality in contemporary Orthodoxy, I refer the reader to the work of Kristina Stoeckl (in particular, Shtekl' 2012).

fundamental, and even provocative, questions that this study has placed before us. Has Russian Orthodoxy really lacked—and does it continue to lack—the resources that would render it capable, if not of furthering political modernization, then at least of not impeding it? Must Russian Orthodoxy really remain forever hostage to traditional notions of power, society, and man that are deeply rooted in the Byzantine legacy? And what then lies in store for the Russian Orthodox Church if the social transformations that Sitnikov outlines do indeed come to pass?

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