



**Sergei Filatov and Alexey Malashenko (Eds.) (2011).
The Orthodox Church under the New Patriarch.
(*Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' pri novom patriarkhe*). Moscow:
Moscow Carnegie Centre (in Russian). — 416 pages.**

Published at the end of 2011, this book is sure to be of interest to religious scholars, political scientists and sociologists, as well as to inquisitive readers. It should be said that the very idea of such a book is long overdue. The three years of Patriarch Kirill's tenure have brought many new developments to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC).¹ Unfortunately, those developments have not been fully conceptualized within academia and non-confessional religious studies. With this in mind, an attempt at such conceptualization made by recognized and well-known scholarly authorities on issues related to the Church can only be received positively. One should keep in mind that the contemporary life

of the ROC receives very little attention in Russian-language academic literature. In any case, it is covered far less than would be desirable or than might be expected. Therefore, any work that claims to provide an analysis of the political, social, and cultural scope of the Church's activity in recent years will necessarily attract attention.

The book contains quite a bit of interesting material. While some articles contain a great deal of information and food for thought, unfortunately the book as a whole is marked with a few shortcomings that will be discussed below.

The book consists of nine articles (in fact ten if we count the conclusion), some of which originated in presentations and debates in seminars hosted at the Moscow Carnegie Center. Apparently, these seminars on the recent history and contemporary state of Russian Orthodoxy served as the primary impulse for the production of the collection, since the only thing that

First published in Russian in *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom*. (2012). 30(2): 318-25.

1. Kirill I was enthroned as patriarch on February 1, 2009. Three years refers to the time of the writing of the book review. — The editors.

connects all these articles is this very broad theme. What we have here is a rather general sketch of the state of the ROC between 1988 and 2011. Among the questions raised are the problems of religious education (Valery Ovchinnikov), the position of the Russian Orthodox Church outside the Russian Federation (Nadezhda Belyakova and Andrei Okara), an analysis of the ROC's media image (Roman Lunkin), and finally, a description of the actual policies — a “political portrait” — of Patriarch Kirill (Sergei Filatov), and much more besides. The last article specifically mentioned is essentially the only article whose content actually reflects the title of the collection.

Such thematic inconsistency would be natural in a scholarly journal, but it is questionable for an edited volume of articles. It is not clear why these articles appear in a single volume and in this particular order. It would have been possible in any case to split the collection into several thematic sections. Given the variety of articles included here, this would not have been easy, but at least it would have made the contributions easier to comprehend.

It is, however, worth mentioning that the quality of the articles that form the overall collection is quite high. For example, Nadezhda Belyakova's study of the state of the ROC in the Baltic countries makes up for the volume's eclecti-

cism with the profound knowledge of the subject matter it exhibits. Anatoly Pchelintsev's article “The Russian Orthodox Church and the Army: Historical Experience and Contemporary Problems of Cooperation,” presents the reader with remarkable examples of collaborative efforts between the military and the Church in the Russian Empire. It also poses a number of important and timely questions in regard to the modern legal position of religion in the armed forces. Boris Knorre's overview of the forms and methods of the ROC's social services draws an exceptionally interesting picture of the activities of the church's charitable organizations — a picture little known outside of the circles of church-going believers. However, it is not entirely clear what these articles have to do with “the Church under the New Patriarch,” given the fact that these pieces, along with most of the articles in the volume, relate to a much earlier period and sometimes even to other areas of study.

This is quite natural. It is difficult and senseless to talk about Orthodoxy in the Baltic States without mentioning its circumstances in the interwar and Soviet periods. When discussing the position of religion in the army, it is no less natural to mention Protestant movements, although this does not directly relate to Patriarch Kirill's activities or even

to the general tendencies of the ROC during his tenure.

Another surprising aspect of the collection is the mixing of strictly academic articles with journalistic essays that deal with the problems of the Church. This is not meant to question the quality of these essays, however. For instance, the article by Hegumen Pyotr (Meshcherinov) entitled “Modern Church Conscience and Aspects of Secular Ideology from the Communist Past” is well written and raises profound questions. Moreover, like any serious intellectual effort, the essay is based on the works of established sociologists and historians. However, we can hardly describe it as scholarly research, which, of course, does not diminish its value. The same can be said about Valery Ovchinnikov’s article “On Orthodox Education in Russia” and even to a certain extent about the collection’s opening and most lengthy article, Sergei Filatov’s “Patriarch Kirill: Two Years of Plans, Dreams, and Uncomfortable Reality.”

When reading *The Orthodox Church under the New Patriarch*, the combination of journalism (even if serious) with scrupulous academic work is one of the first things one notices. Again, this problem could have been avoided had the different types of essays been placed in separate parts of the collection. This would even have created a good impression: the authors and editors would have

offered us an attempt at a comprehensive understanding of the current condition of the ROC from a secular, academic standpoint, as well as from the standpoint of society and even that of the Church. Nothing of the sort, however, has been done: journalistic commentary and scholarly articles are interspersed with each other without any apparent logic.

Meanwhile, the collection clearly has pretensions to being a disinterested scholarly approach to the problematics of the Church. In his conclusion, one of its editors, Aleksei Malashenko, writes that within ROC circles, “they are sensitive to objective analysis of internal Church life and the situation around the Church, thinking that only church-goers should write about these problems, following the official line, or even better—those who work in Church institutions” (407). Malashenko sees in the attempts made by the studies undertaken for this collection not only a high level of professionalism and objectivity, but even courage. There is no question that certain members of the clergy are not always open to academic discussions about the problems the Church faces. While there is also no doubt about the high professional level of most of the collection’s authors, when it comes to objectivity certain questions arise. In addition, the different ways in which the term “objectivity” can be understood should

have been considered in the conceptualization of the book.

It is even more of an issue that a certain mixture of genres can be found within the same individual articles. Some articles, while written in a quite academic manner, with the inclusion of a large number of sources and research, clearly and consciously depart from the principles of academic impartiality. What follows are examples from the first article in the collection by Sergei Filatov. As part of a discussion about who will benefit from restitution [of Church property], Filatov writes: “In many places, our befouled and defaced urban and rural landscapes are being transformed. These places are becoming attractive to the eye. The Russian people have a strong aesthetic sensibility, and it is finding its satisfaction. Congratulations on the victory, my good aesthetes!” (51).

Later, reflecting on a well-known conflict between the Archbishop Pavel Adelgeim and Metropolitan of Pskov and Velikie Luki Evsei (Savvin), Filatov writes: “Arbitrariness and petty tyranny, which lead to a lack of responsibility and stifle initiatives, remain the norm in many eparchies. In such a setting, how can church life revive?” (56–57). In his conclusion, looking at the collaboration between the Church and the state government, he adds: “It is hard to imagine that the ROC believes that

the current political system will last for long in Russia, or that this moment will remain in the national consciousness as a period to be proud of” (65). Thus in reality this collection is so heterogeneous that it is difficult to talk about any sort of central idea or common uniting principle, except for the general subject matter—the Russian Orthodox Church.

It is possible to agree with many of Filatov’s statements, the ones cited here as well as others. We can agree that it takes courage to express them openly under the given circumstances. But how can a text such as this one have any claim to “objectivity”? Can it be labeled as scholarly analysis? If so, then only with serious qualification.

The same criticism, though to a lesser extent, must be directed at the articles written by Alexander Verkhovsky and Roman Lunkin. These two articles, just like Filatov’s, include discussion of quite interesting questions, with some scholarly analysis. It is therefore worth examining them in greater detail.

Verkhovsky’s “Nationalism of the Russian Orthodox Church Leadership in the First Decade of the 21st Century” broaches the subject of an expanded (or, conversely, narrowed) interpretation of the term “nationalism” in Russian scholarship in general and in religious studies in particular. The views of the leadership of the ROC are examined as one form of eth-

nic and civilizational nationalism. There is also an overview of connections between the ROC and secular, nationalistic groups and, according to the author's understanding, nationalistically oriented groups inside the government.

Roman Lunkin's article "The Image of the ROC in the Secular Mass Media: Between the Myth of a State Church and Occult Folk-Orthodoxy" presents an amply detailed and thorough analysis of the representations of the ROC in print media and television in the past two decades. The picture drawn by the author is, to a large extent, justified. Nevertheless, the relative lack of attention Lunkin affords to the ROC's web presence, above all in electronic publications, is very surprising. This would make sense in a discussion of the media image of the Church in the 1990s. But if the focus of this publication is in fact the years of Patriarch Kirill's tenure, then we have to recognize that, at least for young Russians (including religious ones), the internet has emerged as an important source of information. If it has not necessarily become the primary source, then it is in any case in second place in terms of importance, well ahead of traditional newspapers and magazines. Lunkin himself clearly confirms this: in his references list, the internet versions of well-known newspapers clearly supersede print versions. Despite this, online newspapers and news websites (not to

mention reputable blogs) were not covered in his analysis.

How relevant is this book? It has certain articles that do not introduce any new material, but still profitably synthesize information. For instance, Andrei Okara, in his article "The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate): Between Exarchate and Autocephaly" does not offer the reader any significant new information. However, Okara lays out in great detail internal UOC MP discussions that are relatively unknown to readers in Russia. This alone makes the article useful and necessary. The same can be said about many points raised in Boris Knorre's article. For example, a full enumeration of the Church's social institutions, projects, and initiatives is not news to those who follow the life of the contemporary ROC, but in the context of this article its inclusion is justified.

Overall, it must be mentioned that despite interesting generalizations, real life evolves so quickly that many of the authors' conclusions, not to mention the materials they study, quickly become outdated. This is the great conundrum for all studies of extremely timely topics. There is always the imminent risk of obsolescence in researching contemporary social processes. In defense of the authors of *The Orthodox Church under the New Patriarch*, it has to be said that it is precisely the period from the end

of 2011 to the beginning of 2012 that saw a greater concentration of noteworthy events than any other period since the election of Patriarch Kirill, and this period happened to fall outside the book's temporal bounds. Thus the book could not include the visit to Russia of the Cincture (Belt) of the Most Holy Mother of God that took place in October and November 2011.² Even more significantly absent are the initiative of the Inter-Council Presence on the reorganization of ecclesiastical life, the media scandals of spring 2012, and any analysis of the Pussy Riot performance in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior that provoked heated discussions in both Church and secular circles. The Pussy Riot protest performance alone provoked so much commentary in print, on the internet and on television as to warrant an article dedicated solely to the topic.

When it comes to the general limitations of this collection, there are two more points worth making. First, it appears that the collection has not been properly edited. This is clear from a large quantity of tell-tale minutiae. For example, in Filatov's article there is a phrase that is repeated verbatim at the beginning and at the end of the text (pages

16 and 62 respectively). The lack of general editing (and a detail of this nature would have been detected through even the most cursory editing) may be connected with the above-mentioned absence of coherence in the conceptualization of the collection. This shortcoming increases the difficulty of both reading and analyzing the book.

More importantly, upon closing the book, the reader will have a hard time determining the intended audience for *The Orthodox Church under the New Patriarch*. Is it intended for professional religious studies scholars, and also political scientists as well as sociologists who are interested in religious issues? Such collections are needed and recently there have not been many of them published. However, even in the collection's strictly scholarly articles there is hardly anything new for professional religious studies scholars.

Perhaps this book is meant for, shall we say, "a wide range of educated readers"? Such collections are also needed, and Filatov's or Hegumen Pyotr's general articles could interest people who are superficially familiar with church life but have taken an interest in it. However, these readers would hardly need the narrowly specialized studies of Knorre or Pchelintsev.

Is this book also meant for religious studies students? This would be the noblest purpose, and there are successful examples in this

2. Sent from the Vatopedi Monastery on Mt. Athos, this relic, believed by the faithful to effect miracles including curing diseases and aiding with fertility, attracted millions of pilgrims during its visit to Russia. — The editors

genre. However, in giving the students such an enormous amount of information, *The Orthodox Church under the New Patriarch* would not so much help them to understand the complex situation as confuse them due to its lack of a unified structure and central idea, its mixture of genres, etc.

It seems that the only type of reader for whom this book would be absolutely useful – and the only likely type of reader – would be a journalist who has a general understanding of the life of the ROC and the ability to seek out information independently, who at the same time might be in need of a certain orientation that this book can offer. Despite some uncertainties raised by the inconsistent quality among

individual articles, the artificial way of putting them together, and other structural flaws, I would like to reiterate that this does not detract from the depth, the scholarly or journalistic value, or the relevance of particular articles included in the collection. Many of the questions raised require in-depth analysis, and the collection has shed light on them: these include peculiarities of the program and policies of the new patriarch, trends in the Church's social services, debates surrounding the participation of the ROC in education, and the dynamics of the ROC's image in mass media and mass consciousness.

Konstantin Mikhailov (Translation by Natalya Domina)

Alexander Agadjanian and Kathy Rousselet (Eds.) (2011). *Parish and Community in Today's Orthodox Christianity: The Grassroots of Russian Religiosity. (Prikhod i obshchina v sovremennom pravoslavii: kornevaia sistema rossiiskoi religioznosti)*. Moscow: Ves' Mir (in Russian). – 368 pages.

This collection of articles, written by the participants in a Russian-French joint project entitled *Twenty Years of Transformation: Religious and Social Practices in Russian Orthodox Parishes*, represents a rather successful

attempt at a balanced and rational analysis of one of the main components of modern Russia's religious life, i.e., Russian Orthodoxy, and in particular its local forms of existence within the framework of its primary forms – communities, above all parish-based communities. The authors' task was to perform a “multifaceted analysis of the

First published in Russian in *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom*. (2012). 30(1): 253-57.