

These two concepts are crucial when characterizing the system of church authority and the entirety of relationships within the Church. The author concludes that these practices can be classified as the kinds of social ties that Laurent Thévenot called the “grammar of the common through the personal”: “by giving blessing and assigning penance, the priest allows a person to become part of the community and network, be it the temple, the parish, or the Church as a whole — these are all ‘common places’ as discussed by Thévenot” (314). These values, which dominate in the Church, can be juxtaposed with the experience of a “liberal grammar,” which assumes the “reconciliation of mutual concessions.”

I will not specifically address the book’s remaining chapters. It is worth, however, briefly mentioning Boris Knorre’s interesting analysis of the psychological types present

within the Church subculture; Ivan Zabaev’s paradoxical conclusion regarding the “sacred individualism” that predominates in Russian Orthodoxy; and the unusual case of a Tiumen parish community self-organizing with no priest, as described in Roman Poplavsky’s text. As a whole, the book is one of the first attempts at studying modern Russian Orthodoxy at the “grassroots” level, the parish and community level, rather than at the level of official documents and statements by Church leadership, and this approach immerses us in the actual processes occurring within the Church. It is, then, a pity that this collection’s quite academic, but altogether too neutral title is unlikely to attract potential interested readers.

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**Mikhail Smirnov (2011). *Sociology of Religion: A Dictionary. (Sotsiologiia religii: Slovar’)*. St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg State University Press (in Russian). – 411 pages.**

In the preface to his *Sociology of Religion: A Dictionary*, author Mikhail Smirnov warns us that

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he “recognizes the shortcomings of individual efforts and the impossibility of exhaustively opening up the entire range of both general and particular questions which arise [in this area].” Nevertheless, he hopes,

with reserved optimism, that “in light of the almost complete absence of general descriptions of the history, theory and practice of sociology of religion in Russian scholarly literature, the work done will prove useful for the sociology of religion in modern-day Russia” (3–40). The author is quite right in his self-assessment. The main point is this: in this instance, the term “useful” is highly accurate. The significance of this book cannot be divorced from the context of a serious lag in the state of Russian knowledge in this area relative to the global state of the field, despite all the efforts made in recent decades. The efforts of the Russian sociologists in question include a fairly large number of specific empirical studies, many of which were substantive and produced good results. However, what most of them clearly lack is a concrete connection between empirical data and the dynamically developing theoretical and conceptual baggage that has accumulated to date in the sociology of religion internationally. The majority of Russian authors do not even make an effort to place their research in the general frame of reference established within the discipline internationally, preferring to interpret their data in language that is strict when possible but remains semi-

journalistic. The issue here lies in the authors’ isolation from the complex and highly developed Western tradition, the absence of regular contact with foreign scholars and unavailability of current literature, the lack of translations of key theoretically significant works, and so on. We can say that the work of the founding fathers, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, has been more or less “digested.” And while such concepts such as “charisma” or “the profane” now seem entirely organic in the Russian literature, we must concede that everything coming after the classics has been understood in a fragmentary and simplified manner, and much remains simply unknown.

There have been other attempts to create an integral, conceptual exposition of the foundations of the sociology of religion. Several textbooks on this subject were published in the 1990s and 2000s (Iablokov 2007; Garadzha 2005; Veremchuk 2004; Filatova 2000), which, in one way or another, transmit the international state of the discipline. For all their importance, these publications only selectively engage the whole complex system of ideas, concepts, and methods associated with the sociology of religion internationally, showing a clear preference for some while ignoring others. In these books, the authors’ approaches can be clearly discerned. This

is entirely natural. It is worth mentioning that in the West as well, many textbooks of this kind are based, understandably, on the preferences and experiences of the authors (Christiano, et al. 2008; Davie 2007; Cipriani 2000).

Smirnov's *Dictionary* attempts to provide as comprehensive and objective a depiction as possible, restraining the author's own biases, even though they still come through in his selection of entries and their presentation. One tremendous benefit of the *Dictionary* is indeed its broad scope. It covers a wide range of facts, concepts, and controversies that make up the century-long history of the discipline — material that far surpasses the limits of the material in Russian textbooks, including material that is largely ignored in Russian empirical sociology with its myopic tendencies. The classics do not overwhelm the *Dictionary*, which affords authors of “secondary” and “tertiary” importance to the field (relatively speaking) the recognition they deserve. Thus we find information not only on Weber and Talcott Parsons, but also on Robert Bellah, Peter Berger, Rodney Stark, as well as more contemporary authors like Eileen Barker, Grace Davie, José Casanova and others who are less well known but have contributed to the current state of the field.

Smirnov has one other clear goal in this *Dictionary*: integrating

Russian names and achievements into the global history of the discipline. Relying on his past research into this subject, Smirnov includes Russian scholars from A. Vvedensky and M. Kovalevsky to R. Lopatkin, V. Garadzha and others (Smirnov 2008). This task of integration is difficult and risky: for example, the same amount of space is devoted to Igor Iablokov as to José Casanova,<sup>1</sup> and to Dmitry Urganovich about as much as to Gaetano Mosca and David Martin. As patriotic as this approach might be, and despite the author's wholly justified desire to illuminate the little-known efforts of his compatriots, these inclusions run the risk of distorting the real balance of contributions to the discipline. Smirnov himself seems to admit that the study of religion as a social phenomenon in Russia has not led to the formation of a tangible school or established tradition. The only exception is the Marxist system of views, largely imposed by the state, whose potential advantages were more often than not cancelled out by its openly reductionist interpretations. Sociologically minded Russian scholars of religion (*religiovedy*) (using this term in the absence of the discipline of religious studies in Russia) nevertheless achieved

1. The *Dictionary* unfortunately incorrectly transliterates Casanova's first name as "Жозе" (Zhoze).

results, as Smirnov shows — of course not thanks to, but rather in spite of, simplistic Marxist models. Scholars such as Yuri Levada were nourished by the ideas of Western sociology, while others, such as Alexander Klibanov, paid directly for their research with years in Stalinist labor camps.<sup>2</sup>

I repeat, the desire to reflect the results of Russian thinking about the social functions of religion is itself perfectly justified and appropriate in a work written for a Russian readership. But the excessive scope of the list of compatriots who have made a contribution to the sociology of religion does *not* seem justified. Pyotr Lavrov, the subject of a very extensive article in the *Dictionary*, considered sociology purely instrumental despite his sensitivity for the discipline. Even Smirnov finds Lavrov's opinions about religion "biased." It is still more of a stretch to talk about the contributions to the sociology of religion from authors such as Georgy Plekhanov and Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin), to whom Smirnov also allots a fair amount of space — even if Smirnov, usually reserved in his judgments, allows himself to

reproach Ulyanov for his "limited vision" and "blatant disregard for the results achieved by the science of his time." What is the point of bringing in Ulyanov? After all, many other powerful political leaders with pretenses to knowledge of the social sciences spoke about the "social roots of religion" in the same spirit.

Some such inclusions in the *Dictionary* seem even more out of place when you consider that several important *bona fide* sociologists of religion were left out: for example, contemporary Russian scholars such as Dmitri Furman or Sergei Filatov, who wrote about religion in the West and began to actively research religion in contemporary Russia in the 1990s. (I would dare to suggest that Furman has done more for the sociology of religion than Ulyanov.) Some key Western scholars are also not included in the *Dictionary*; among those missing is Louis Dumont, a brilliant representative of the school associated with Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, whose ideas about holism and hierarchism were based on a comparison of Indian and Western societies, their religious traditions in particular. Also missing is American sociologist Nancy Ammerman along with the entire research tradition associated with Hartford Seminary. The *Dictionary* has no entry for Ronald Inglehart, the originator of the concept of "post-materialist

2. It is strange that instead of saying so outright in Klibanov's biography, Smirnov resorts to an inappropriately evasive, cautious phrasing: "Ideological circumstances from the 1930s to the mid-1950s prevented this work from being carried out."

values” and the related idea of “new spirituality.” He also inspired and conducted the World Values Survey, an attempt to “measure” values that has been ongoing for several decades and now includes nearly 80 countries (religious matters occupy an important place in these surveys). The reader will also not find Jürgen Habermas in the *Dictionary*, despite the fact that Habermas’s works from the 2000s, which conceptualize the dynamics of religious pluralism and the “post-secular,” have considerably influenced contemporary debates about religion. Talal Asad, who has written extensively about the meaning of and relationship between religion and secularity, is also unaccounted for. While it is true that Habermas and Asad are not “sociologists of religion” in the narrow disciplinary sense, it’s worth mentioning that the *Dictionary* (quite justifiably) contains articles about some other philosophers and anthropologists.

That is enough about what the *Dictionary* lacks — let us return to what it *does* include. I repeat once more: this publication contains a great wealth of information on a number of leading sociologists and their contributions. It outlines their main ideas briefly and clearly, yet with sufficient depth. All of this reveals the massive effort Smirnov expended on the pages of journals and monographs, which is all the more valuable given

that the majority of sociologists included are unavailable in Russian translation.

In addition to describing a large number of personalities who have shaped the history of the discipline, Smirnov attempts to describe the basic concepts of the sociology of religion. I would suggest that in this part of the *Dictionary*, he takes an even greater risk, potentially provoking criticism both for his interpretation and for his selection of these concepts. For example, such concepts as “charisma,” “fundamentalism,” “pluralism” and “sect” are absolutely necessary — the special language of the discipline consists precisely in them. Smirnov provides us with sober, precise definitions of them, and if you do not agree with something, it may result from a substantive dispute. But when the author tackles the scholarly description of concepts such as “faith,” “belief,” and “believer,” or lines up a series of articles about “religiousness,” “religious consciousness,” and “religion,” or tries to distinguish the concepts of “clergy” (sviashchennosluzhiteli) and “ministers” (sluzhiteli kul’ta), or define “belonging to a church” or “superstition” — in these instances he sets off on a slippery path fraught with tension, interconnections, and lack of rigor, transgressing the limits of the language of the discipline and even of scholarly language in general.

In revealing the importance of general (non-specialized) terms, it would make sense at least to connect them to the way they are used in the context of sociology. For example, let's take the word "pilgrimage." In this context its definition should not be limited to general knowledge that can be found in any other dictionary or encyclopedia (its etymology, a simple definition such as "individual and group travel to sacred religious sites (...) and so forth), but should show how and by whom this phenomenon has been studied from sociological points of view. Some articles might cause confusion — for example, the term "rite" (obriad) is quite appropriate for inclusion, but for some reason Smirnov tries to distinguish the term's meaning from that of "ritual" (ritual), which is described in a separate article. Ritual is interpreted as "an ordered sequence of rites," which, in sociological parlance, is not in the least bit necessary. Then there is an article about "ritualism" (obriadoverie) — quite a value-laden term — that already seems out of place in a sociological dictionary. In an article on "folk religion" (narodnoi religii), Smirnov correctly considers "folk religion" (also "local religion," although it would be proper also to use the currently very popular term "vernacular religion") in contrast to "popular religion." However, folk religion is defined for no clear reason as a mere aggregate of "beliefs," although, in fact, it is

inseparable from a set of *practices*. In addition, the author should probably make clear to the reader of the Russian-language *Dictionary* that the specifically Russian term for "folk religion" is particularly ideologically charged — to the point that it is almost inappropriate for use in scholarly discourse. By contrast, in the article on "non-traditional religions" Smirnov clearly and convincingly expounds on "the ambiguity of application" of the term, its ideological baggage, but does not go so far as to declare it generally unfit for scholarly language. In admitting and analyzing similar terms, Smirnov may have set himself a certain secondary goal — not only to present the language of the scholarly discipline, but also to deconstruct the politicized language environment that has developed around it in the broader public sphere. This is an extremely difficult task that could have been better accomplished by making it an explicit, self-conscious problem within the larger project.

At the end of the *Dictionary*, Smirnov includes an extensive, convenient bibliography of Russian, Soviet and Western works. Incidentally, the names whose omission from the *Dictionary* proper I regretted above do appear in the bibliography along with their works. This section offers a great deal more breadth than can be found in rest of the *Dictionary*, and

of course it would be impossible and unnecessary to include individual articles on every scholar mentioned in the bibliography.

I will conclude my review with a discussion of the beginning of the *Dictionary*. Here, we find a brief outline of the history of the sociology of religion, which is divided into Western and Russian sections to make it more convenient and comprehensible. Among the main topics treated, in my view, something important is missing: the huge, phenomenally growing literature of the past two decades on Pentecostal and charismatic movements, or the literature on the same topics treated in the context of the “post-secular.” Meanwhile, the predominant American tradition of quantitative sociology of religion, in contrast to the European tradition, is not emphasized. However, in general, the historical overview is very comprehensive and logical. It illustrates perfectly the logic of the discipline, its self-determination in the form of a series of distinctions (and the experience of the self-limiting of individual scholars), such as the distinctions between the positive and the normative, between genuinely graspable and ungraspable “religious experience,” and so on.

In my opinion, the final section of the essay, where Mikhail Smirnov makes an overall assessment of “the status and prospects” of the discipline, is superbly written, as

illustrated by the following vivid quotation about “the problem of [the discipline’s] scholarly self-determination”: “The sociology of religion can be viewed as one of the offshoots of general sociology, or as one of the approaches to religious studies, or as religious reflection on the social dimension of religion (...). Any of these positions—a hierarchical approach to the ‘hypostases’ in question, or their equality and complementarity, or the exclusivity of any one of them—has its adherents and opponents. So far, there is generally a dynamic balance of these ‘disciplinary identities.’ All of them are limited in different ways.”

Smirnov goes on to give an excellent formulation of these “limitations,” which I will not reproduce here, but I encourage everyone to read (31–32). He subsequently shows just how dynamic the scope of this discipline is—it drastically narrows or expands depending on how a particular sociologist interprets the concept of “religion.” As we can see, Mikhail Smirnov has chosen a complicated and hazardous genre, one that makes his material difficult to “tame.” However, on the whole, Smirnov’s gamble pays off. My first reaction to the *Dictionary* (it is an extremely useful book) remains my final verdict.

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