



PROJECT MUSE®

---

## **Globalization and Orthodox Christianity: The Transformation of Religious Tradition by Victor Roudometof (review)**

Alexander Mirkovic

Journal of Modern Greek Studies, Volume 32, Number 2, October 2014,  
pp. 458-460 (Review)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press  
DOI: [10.1353/mgs.2014.0035](https://doi.org/10.1353/mgs.2014.0035)



➔ For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/mgs/summary/v032/32.2.mirkovic.html>

Victor Roudometof, *Globalization and Orthodox Christianity: The Transformation of Religious Tradition*. New York; London: Routledge, 2014. Pp. xviii + 228. 4 maps, 3 tables. Cloth \$125.00.

Those of us who grew up as members of the Orthodox Church clearly remember that we were told that the Church never changes, that from the time when the apostles were leading it until today, it remained essentially the same. Yet, when we acquired historical and social consciousness we became aware that human institutions transform together with the always-changing society, the Church included. Very often, however, we keep these mature insights to ourselves in order not to disturb the tradition. Victor Roudometof is one of those courageous and exceptional scholars who studies change in the Orthodox Churches and in the societies that we, for the lack of better term, call Eastern Orthodox. Drawing on his wide-ranging experience in the field of sociology of religion, Roudometof paints a picture of the Orthodox Church that is dynamic and detailed. The picture of static, unchangeable Orthodox culture that the author seeks to dismantle does not come only from within. Very often, this picture is imposed by the West. Many Western scholars take the unity between the Orthodox tradition and the community as a given starting point and assume the existence of an unchanging Orthodox Commonwealth at all times in history. Roudometof makes it very clear that this is a misleading picture. According to him, Orthodox Christianity is far more creative in its answers to the modern world than either its supporters or critics give it credit for.

In order to analyze the relationship between religion and community, Roudometof looks at the relationship between Orthodoxy and globalization. He identifies four different social processes—vernacularization, indigenization, nationalization, and transnationalization. All of these represent the ways by which the Orthodox religion has been transformed or has transformed itself in reaction to the process of globalization. The essence of Roudometof's argument is that it is not true that Orthodoxy in the global world is characterized only by the rise of ethno-nationalism and by the ever-closer identification of tradition with society. He rightfully and forcefully criticizes the Western concept of secularization, which puts the rest of the world in a passive role and engenders reaction in two distinctly anti-Western forms: ethno-nationalism and religious fundamentalism. He understands that Orthodoxy is not just about reacting to the West and its version of modernity: modern Orthodoxy is much more complex than simple pride in eternal Orthodox tradition and the obsession of being different from the West.

Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 present an acute sociological analysis of the various modern reactions to nationalism by the Orthodox Church. The differences in how Orthodoxy and nationalism interact in various social environments are at the core of this book's argument. First there are the societies that emerged as post-Ottoman states in the Balkans. There nationalism could be seen as a struggle for identity in the transnational Ottoman Empire, and we should not forget that the nationalism of the Balkan Christians is often counterbalanced by the transnational approach of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Secondly, we have the case of Imperial Russia, where the problem of alienation between the rigid state structures and ordinary believers was acute. Roudometof rightfully points to the Russian Old Believers to illustrate subtle differences in the way Orthodox Christians reacted to the globalizing Russian Empire. The best

chapter in this book is, in my opinion, the chapter on Cyprus, which also deals with the Orthodox Church in the colonial situation. There Roudometof masterfully explains how the Church of Cyprus was creative in its dealings with British colonial authorities and how that interaction shaped Cypriot society. Finally, in the multi-ethnic context of the United States, Roudometof argues that Orthodox Christianity is profoundly transnational, though still struggling to overcome the boundaries of national groups. Altogether, Roudometof presents an impressive sociological analysis of the modern Orthodox world.

The further we go back into the past, the less information we have, and that makes the task of historical sociology more difficult. Thus, it was surprising that in Chapters 2 and 3 the author decided to go far back into the past. Chapter 2 covers the emergence of Byzantine religious consensus and the separation of Christian West from the East, while Chapter 3 analyzes the catastrophic incursion into Byzantium by the Crusaders, and the emergence of a Byzantine cultural sphere, what eventually became the Byzantine Commonwealth (Dimitri Obolensky, 362). The author just assumes that these events from the distant past affect current Orthodox societies. However, the mechanism of that effect is not fully explained. Could it be that the “memory of the Crusades” is also a modern phenomenon? Is it reasonable to assume that Orthodox believers still retain unmitigated the memory of events from centuries ago? Roudometof mentions Orientalism and the Orthodox reaction to it as ways by which the past is mitigated, but this aspect of how we remember is not fully explored. For example, Roudometof points to George Finlay’s 1853 *History of the Byzantine Empire from DCXVI to MLVII* as the prime example of Western Orientalism, but one is left wondering, did the rift between the East and the West really occur in the thirteenth century or does it have more to do with the imperialist agenda of the nineteenth century?

There is one omission in this otherwise excellent book and that is the minimal mention of various secular and anti-clerical social movements, especially in the Soviet Union. Roudometof is absolutely right to claim that in the contemporary postmodern world, secularization and modernization are not as important as they were in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, in the case of the Orthodox culture, I am not sure that Soviet atheism and anti-clericalism should be ignored in a book that covers modern transformations of the Orthodox religious tradition. Atheism and anti-clericalism also deserve a sociological explanation, and this is something that I look forward to reading about in the forthcoming books of Victor Roudometof. The reading pleasure that this book provides, not only to the scholar but to an educated, non-specialized reader as well is diminished only by its high price. I hope that the publisher will decide to re-issue this worthy book in a less expensive paperback format and thus make it more widely available.

ALEXANDER MIRKOVIC  
*Eastern Michigan University*

## REFERENCES CITED

Finlay, George

1853 *History of the Byzantine Empire from DCXVI to MLVII*. Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons.

Obolensky, Dimitri

1971 *Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500–1453*. New York: Praeger.

Craig Stockings and Eleanor Hancock. *Swastika over the Acropolis: Re-interpreting the Nazi Invasion of Greece in World War II*. Leiden; Boston: Brill. 2013. Pp. xiv + 645. 38 photographs, 22 figures. Cloth €192, US \$249.

This book constitutes Volume 92 of the History of Warfare series; it is, therefore, an exercise in military history. It is concerned with *Operation Marita*, the German invasion of Greece on 6 April 1941. What is claimed to be original about this study is that it challenges the received wisdom about the campaign and synthesizes the operations of all nations concerned—British, Australian, New Zealand, Greek, Italian, and German. This is important because the fighting in mainland Greece is seriously understudied in the English, German, and Greek literature compared with, say, the subsequent Battle of Crete.

The authors argue that there is a “commonsense” about *Marita* comprising the following key elements: the British and Dominion troops in Greece were let down by their respective governments; the Force was sent for political rather than purely military reasons; overwhelming German numerical and material superiority, particularly in armor and in the air, forced the British out of Greece; Greek strategic planning for the defense of the country was poor; Greek military collapse on the west flank of the defense ensured that British positions were untenable; senior Greek commanders collaborated with the Germans and wanted the British out so that a truce could be declared; and *Operation Marita* resulted in the fatal delay of *Operation Barbarossa*. The rest of the book is a frontal attack on this “commonsense” position.

The key strategic consideration in the Balkans was control of the Romanian oil fields at Ploiești; as long as this was secure, Hitler had no interest in the Balkans. However, Mussolini’s opportunistic invasion of Northwestern Greece forced Hitler’s hand as the Greeks fell upon the despised *makaronades* and drove them back into Albania, while the British dispatched an expeditionary force, W Force. The British intervention threatened the timing of *Operation Barbarossa*, on the one hand, while Hitler was all too aware of Mussolini’s political vulnerability because of the failure of his Greek campaign, on the other. Thus Hitler decided reluctantly to attack Greece to ensure that the Allied intervention did not threaten his strategic goal in the east, the invasion of Russia, and to save the face of his Italian ally. The Greek campaign, therefore, came about as a result of British intervention.

The Greek commander, General Papagos, insisted on forward defense in order to protect the homeland from the Italian invasion, while General Wilson, the W Force commander, wanted a rear defense line south of Thrace, which was defended by the