

Victor Roudometof and Vasilios N. Makrides (eds): *Orthodox Christianity in 21st Century Greece: The Role of Religion in Culture, Ethnicity and Politics*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010, xv + 258pp.

Greek Orthodoxy is one of the most neglected topics in the scientific study of Christianity in contemporary Europe. The main focus of almost all scholars within the field of religious studies after the collapse of the Iron Curtain was on the Orthodox communities of the countries previously belonging to the communist bloc. This recent edited volume about Greek Orthodox Christianity in twenty-first-century Greece is both interesting and innovative, because it addresses many issues regarding religion and society in contemporary Greece from other perspectives than the ecclesiastical and theological angles. The editors of the volume are both prominent scholars who have well established knowledge of Greek Orthodoxy and Greek society. Victor Roudometof is Professor at the department of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Cyprus, and Vasilios Makrides has been Professor of Religious Studies in the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Erfurt, Germany, since 1999, and they have both published many books and articles about Greek Orthodoxy and religion in contemporary Greece.

The volume starts with a foreword by the well known sociologist of religion, Grace Davie, who suggests that the contribution of

this book is to enable outsiders (among others, non-Greek speakers) to penetrate the Greek case a little further in order to understand the subtleties and contradictions in Greek religion and its continuing significance for national life (p.xiii). The foreword is followed by an illuminating introduction by the two editors, in which they provide a brief description of their goals and of the following chapters. The volume is divided into two parts, each part consisting of five chapters: the first entitled 'Orthodox Christianity, Greek Ethnicity and Politics', and the second 'Orthodox Christianity and Greek Culture'.

The editors state that the goal of this volume is to allow scholars and researchers to use the Greek experience as a means for fleshing out some of the institutional characteristics and cultural attributes clearly identified with the Eastern Orthodox tradition (p.2). In this respect, the volume does not set out to examine the Greek case in isolation from broader European and/or global trends, and this is important, because until recently the majority of the studies of Greek Orthodoxy treated Greece as a particular and exceptional case study, isolated from the global or even the European context. Here, on the contrary, the goal of the editors is to place the Greek case within the context of contemporary studies in the social sciences and cultural history on the relations between religion, globalization and European modernity. Consequently, since Greek Orthodoxy lives in a

constantly changing world, this book shows how it changes and adapts itself to new exigencies, even if this happens in its own particular way and even if such changes are not always evident at first glance (p.15).

The majority of the contributors are younger scholars, well educated and already known both in Greece and abroad for their work on the study of Greek Orthodoxy. It has to be underlined that until recently, issues of religion and politics and religion and society in Greece were mainly examined either from a historical and legal or a theological and ecclesiastical perspective. Here, by contrast, the contributions address these issues from sociological, anthropological and historical perspectives, which have largely been neglected by mainstream scholars in the past. As a consequence, the main approaches used are qualitative, i.e. ethnography, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, etc. This kind of research is, in my view, much more fruitful than the previous sterile theological and ecclesiastical descriptive studies, which were far removed from Greek social reality.

The themes examined range very widely: Greek Orthodoxy and globalization/modernization; the financial and organisational scandals of 2005 within the Orthodox Church; Greek Orthodoxy and non-Orthodox minorities; women in Orthodoxy; Islam and Muslims within the Greek Orthodox milieu; the controversy about the construction of a Muslim mosque in Athens;

religion and welfare in Greece and the role of the Orthodox Church; Greek citizens' faith and trust in religion and the Orthodox Church (this is the only quantitative contribution in the volume) and finally, religion and popular culture, which is studied through the example of a young monk's pop band. All of topics have provoked extensive discussion and conflict within Greek society during the last decade or so, and could be considered as the most characteristic issues in the first decade of the twenty-first century. However, some other issues could have been included in the volume. For example, the huge conflict between the State and the Orthodox Church of Greece about the removal of religious affiliation from identity cards, which took place in 2000 and led to major protest and the organisation of massive rallies by the Church, could have been included, in order to enable non-Greek readers to form at least an initial understanding of the issue. Furthermore, a special chapter about the legal status of the relations between the state and the Orthodox Church could have been helpful for the non-Greek reader, in order to illustrate the background of the relation between religion and politics in Greece. This criticism does not imply, however, that the volume lacks either in interest or in thematic range, and the reader can undoubtedly gain a relatively thorough overview of contemporary Greek Orthodoxy after reading this volume. The only other critical point, in my view, is that the chapter

regarding Greek Orthodoxy and non-Orthodox minorities (part 1, chapter 5) would have benefited from a contribution by a scholar with better background in the study of religious minorities.

Overall, this volume is a very useful and fruitful one, which casts new light on the issue of Orthodoxy in Greek society, a light that is neither theological and ecclesiastical nor exclusively historical. The volume is of potential interest for researchers and scholars who are interested in knowing about the social and political role of Orthodoxy in contemporary Greece. It is an objective and scientific contribution free of overtly ideological and biased argumentation, and could lead to fertile further research in the near future. Furthermore, it offers a fresh glimpse of the various facets of contemporary Greek Orthodoxy and its ongoing efforts to cope with the challenges of the twenty-first century.

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