Jnl of Ecclesiastical History, Vol. 64, No. 4, October 2013. © Cambridge University Press 2013 827
doi:10.1017/S0022046913000572

REVIEW ARTICLE

The Churches and ex-Communist Europe

by WENDY R. TYNDALE
Oxford
E-mail: wrtyndale@gmail.com

Vatikanische Ostpolitik und die DDR. By Roland Cerny-Werner. Pp. 380 incl. 15 ills and 1 colour plate. Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2011. €49,90. 978 3 89971 875 1

Das Verhältnis von Staat und Kirche in der Orthodoxie. Edited by Burkhard Kämper and Hans-Werner Thönnes. (Essener Gespräche zum Thema Staat und Kirche, 45.) Pp. x+277. Münster: Aschendorff, 2011. €34.80 (paper). 978 3 402 10563 4; 0720 891X

Church, State, and democracy in expanding Europe. By Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu. (Religion and Global Politics.) Pp. xiii+287. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. £40. 978 0 19 533710 5

Each of these three books gives us valuable insights into the complicated ways in which Churches and States in Eastern Europe and Russia have related to each other in the past and how they do so today. Perhaps not necessarily new, but particularly interesting are the reasons described for the different patterns of ecclesiastical power that have emerged in the political contexts and cultures of the different countries. With Lavinia Stan and Lucia Turcescu we have a schematic but also analytic survey of Church–State relations in the new post-Communist member countries of the European Union. The *Essener Gespräche* focus on the historical and theological background of past and present relations between the Orthodox Church and governments in Eastern Europe and in Russia, and they also give us illuminating accounts of how the contemporary Russian Orthodox Church understands its social role and human

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046913000572 Published online by Cambridge University Press

rights. Roland Cerny-Werner gives a detailed view of the Vatican's policies and strategies towards the German Democratic Republic.

In *Church, State and democracy in expanding Europe,* Stan and Turcescu devote each chapter of their book to a different country with a focus on the post-Communist legislative framework, religion and electoral politics, religious instruction in public schools and religion and sexuality (the influence of the Churches on laws and public opinion regarding questions of birth control and sexual identity). A 'historical framework' at the beginning of each chapter gives an informative background about the degree of dominance of certain Churches and state and public attitudes towards religion. This schematic presentation might leave the reader somewhat overwhelmed by separate sets of facts were it not for the concluding chapter which gathers up the information in a thematically-based comparative study. It is through their systematic presentation of the similarities and differences between these new members of the EU that the authors make their original and important contribution to a better understanding of the interplay of Church and State in each of them since 1989.

Given their recent history under Communism, when the Churches were strictly controlled by the Communist party and rights to religious freedom were severely curtailed, all the states in question have found it more necessary than in the West to set up a strictly defined legal framework to regulate their relations with the religious communities within them, but the authors are careful to point out that laws do not necessarily tell the whole story about what goes on in practice. Whether enshrined in their constitutions or decreed through separate acts, the right to religious freedom is proclaimed in all ten countries. Nevertheless, a fear of undue religious influence in politics and society is also reflected, both in the rules of some governments against religion 'being used to political ends' (Bulgaria) and in the control exercised by government bodies set up to monitor the activities of religious communities (Hungary being the only state without such a body). Highlighted as a problem for the European Union's perception of human rights, are the restrictive conditions in many of the countries with which new religious groups have to comply in order to gain official recognition (and with it privileges such as tax breaks and the right to teach religion in schools). In several cases these practices have been at least tacitly supported by dominant Churches (Catholic, Orthodox and, in the case of Latvia, Lutheran) which can often be seen as state Churches in all but name. Tantalising passing references are made to not wholly dissimilar situations in western European countries such as Norway and the United Kingdom. Indeed, the most hotly disputed issues in the post-Communist countries of Eastern Europe are often the subject of equally fervent debates in the West as well. One of these is the question of religious instruction in public schools which is now permitted in all the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046913000572 Published online by Cambridge University Press

countries studied, though the form it takes ranges from confessional classes with catechism in some to classes strictly 'about religion' in others. The final focus of each chapter on religion and sexuality gives an implicitly critical description of the largely conservative attitudes not only of the Churches but of the societies in general. In some cases the Churches have exerted a clear influence on decisions about laws on homosexuality.

Since the foundation of the European Union, the role of religion in European politics has never been absent from the agenda but with the accession of these ten Eastern European states, where, with very few exceptions, levels of religiosity are considerably higher than in the West, the debate about religion and the Christian culture of Europe has been pushed further to the fore. At this time, when the future nature of the EU seems to be in the balance, this book provides an essential basis for the increasing public debate about the Union's fundamental aims and characteristics.

In 1965 the *Essener Gespräche* were founded as annual inter-confessional academic conferences on Church and State and have gained both renown and influence. In the forty-fifth conference in 2011, on the relation of Church and State in Orthodoxy, four enlightening presentations were followed by comments for discussion from philosophers, theologians, church historians and jurists. In the first lecture Gerd Stricker gives a skilful, succinct but comprehensive overview of the relation of Church and State in Orthodoxy beginning with the Byzantine Empire and continuing across Eastern Europe and Russia from the Middle Ages until the present day. A central theme, which is also addressed by later speakers, is how, with its lack of a clear division of power, the Byzantine vision of *symphonia* has, throughout the centuries, laid open the way for the control and use of the Orthodox Church by governments with which the Church has sought a harmonious relationship. But Stricker points out at the same time how the Orthodox Church has gained political influence, both through its very vision of itself as an inseparable partner of the state and through the role that it has played in strengthening and maintaining a keen sense of ethnical identity among its believers. However, he also emphasises that nationalism (and particularly the apparent identification of the Russian Orthodox Church today with President Putin's extreme Russian nationalism) is in no way in accordance with Orthodox tradition.

Theodore Nikolaou, adds some nuances to the picture when he addresses the relationship of State and Church from the Orthodox point of view. Nikolau stresses the meaning of *symphonia* as the cooperation in the service of the people of two independent but not separate powers. He sees the Byzantine model as a 'third way' between a Catholic theocracy and the Protestant territorial principle (*cuius regio, eius religio*) but it is interesting that he also observes that *symphonia* is not possible in cases of states hostile to the Church.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046913000572 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The third speaker, Konstantin Kostjuk, gives a detailed account of the social doctrine of the Russian Orthodox Church focusing on its 'Basic principles of social conception'. He understands this document, produced in the year 2000, as the answer of the Russian Orthodox Church (or of Patriarch Kyrill I) to western liberalism and especially to the challenges faced by the Church in a non-Christian state in which a new third partner, civil society, has arisen. Kostjuk tells how social work was taken over in early years by the Russian state, which left the Church in charge of the soul rather than the body. With its new view of the separation of the Church from the State, this social doctrine denotes an important change for the Orthodox Church in Russia, even if it is limited in scope.

Referring to the same document and to the theology behind it, Otto Luchterhandt dedicates the final lecture to human rights, religious freedom and Orthodoxy with an analysis of why the Russian Orthodox Church rejects any universal claim to human rights, on religious but also on ethical and national cultural grounds. Luchterhandt comments on the confusion in the document between the moral and legal dimensions of human rights and the failure of the Church to see the importance of human rights as providing a moral core to modern states and their societies. During the discussion following his talk, however, the point is made that the western Churches were also slow to accept the concept of human rights after World War II and that the present position could well be only one stage in the development of Orthodox thinking in Russia. However, a different conception of the state would be a pre-requisite for any real change.

Owing to its meticulous detail, Roland Cerny-Werner's *Vatikanische Ostpolitik und die DDR* is far from an effortless read and it is unfortunately made more difficult by the lack of a sorely needed index and list of acronyms. However, it is the very detail that provides an overall fascinating picture of the complexities facing policy-makers at the Vatican in their dealings with Communist East Germany and of the reasons why even an atheistic state, whose avowed intent was the elimination of all religion, could not afford to ignore the importance of the Catholic Church as an internationally recognised and powerful moral authority. Cerny-Werner tells the story of the build-up to what eventually became intense negotiations between the two sides, though diplomatic relations were never fully formalised. The basic theme throughout is the tug-of-war between the Vatican and the government of the GDR, with each side wanting a dialogue with the other but on the basis of little trust, with differing motivation and with opposing long- and even short-term aims in view.

Through letters, reports of meetings and other documents archived by the Vatican in Rome and by the Communist party and the Ministry for State Security as well as by the Catholic Church in the GDR, the reader gains

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046913000572 Published online by Cambridge University Press

a first-hand view of the parts played by key actors in the multi-sided negotiations. The main focus is on Agostino Cardinal Casaroli, who was appointed effectively as the deputy foreign minister for the Vatican in 1961, when the 'aggiornamento' of Pope John XXIII was already under way. He then became the Vatican's principal diplomat for the Communist bloc. Casaroli had inevitably to meet not only personalities from the government of the GDR but also diplomats and politicians of the Federal German Republic (whose policies changed radically with the election of Willy Brandt as Chancellor in 1969) as well as leading church figures on either side of the wall (who did not always agree with each other). Cerny-Werner highlights the differences in the political, pastoral and ecclesiastical interests of all concerned through his descriptions of the negotiations about one of the thorniest immediate issues: the fact that the territory of four of the East German dioceses spanned the border and were under bishops based in the West. It might have been interesting to hear more about the context and consequences for the Church in the GDR of the dogged 'political abstinence' pursued by Alfredo Cardinal Bengsch (bishop of the whole diocese of Berlin but resident in the GDR), in contrast to the much greater engagement on the part of the leaders of the majority Protestant Church, but Cerny-Werner's concern is to point out how Bengsch's stance meant that political dealings were left entirely to the Vatican.

This book provides new information, insights and analysis that complement and add to existing research and literature. For anyone interested in the topic, it is an essential read.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046913000572 Published online by Cambridge University Press