

Book Reviews

Sarah Riccardi-Swartz, *Between Heaven and Russia: Religious Conversion and Political Apostasy in Appalachia*, Orthodox Christianity and Contemporary Thought, New York: Fordham University Press, 2022, xvi. 283pp. Index. \$xx, Paper.

Riccardi-Swartz studied a small community of Orthodox Christians in Woodford, West Virginia, over 90 percent of whom are converts in the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR). Taking an anthropological approach, she analyzes the beliefs, behavior, and conversion stories of members of this community through a political and geopolitical lens, seeking to understand why rural Americans are drawn to Russian Orthodox Christianity “with all its political connotations” (3). Riccardi-Swartz interprets this phenomenon as evidence of disenchantment with the U.S., liberalism, and democracy (and therefore, as the title suggests, as political apostasy).

ROCOR is a small Orthodox jurisdiction that was founded by Russian emigres following the Russian Revolution with a presence around the globe. Historically, ROCOR was vehemently anti-communist, and ROCOR considered the Russian Orthodox Church in the USSR heretical for its collusion with the atheistic, Soviet government. Until 2007, ROCOR was not widely recognized as canonical by global Orthodoxy, nor was it in communion with the Moscow Patriarchate (MP) after the MP’s restoration in 1943. Since 2007, ROCOR has been absorbed by the MP as part of a concerted effort on the patriarchate’s part to extend its power and Russian influence globally. Since then, a subsection within ROCOR in the United States has become uncritically accepting of the MP and the close cooperation between church and state in Russia. Many of those that Riccardi-Swartz interacted with in Woodford look positively upon the resurgence of Orthodoxy in Russia during the Putin years and applaud Putin and Patriarch Kirill for their defense of traditional Christian values—namely opposition to same-sex marriage and the trans movement—in the face of modern secularism.

Riccardi-Swartz argues that American converts are changing the character of ROCOR—even embracing more Russianness, for example, by using Church Slavonic—and contributing to a new religio-political phenomenon that she calls “reactive Orthodoxy,” a “strain of Orthodoxy” driven by converts who increasingly would welcome state support if not enforcement for their “political ideologies, often framed ... as theologies” (174). Motivated by “nostalgic apocalypticism”

(14), reactive Orthodox believers embrace extreme illiberal political ideologies—monarchism, the “antithesis... of American democracy” (96) in the case of the Woodford community—and appear ready to abandon separation of church and state as a hallmark of American life. This longing for cooperation between church and state is a key defining feature of Christian nationalism, and Riccardi-Swartz sees Christian nationalism as a feature of “reactive Orthodoxy.”

The challenge Riccardi-Swartz has is to persuade readers that the extremist views of a few dozen fundamentalist Orthodox Christians in rural West Virginia matter without falling into over-generalizations, based on her observations and empirical data from the small Woodford community, about ROCOR, American Orthodoxy, or the alt-right. She persuasively contends that ROCOR provides a window into understanding “the transnational project of conservative Christian moral outrage, perhaps even radicalization, toward the assumed expansion of progressive secularism” (108). Her ongoing work analyzing Orthodox digital and social media networks across jurisdictional lines is important to test her theories about “reactive Orthodoxy,” but also to contribute to a better understanding of “the philosophical turn to Russia in American religion” more broadly (108). After all, members of ROCOR may see themselves as “traditionalist” and other Orthodox jurisdictions as “modern,” but ROCOR is hardly alone among Orthodox churches—even in the U.S.—in its maintenance of patriarchy, hierarchy, traditional gender roles, and conservatism especially regarding LGBTQ+ issues. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 makes more urgent the question about how deep “the philosophical turn to Russia” runs.

Riccardi-Swartz highlights the religious and political diversity of Appalachia, noting that the extreme right views of the Woodford ROCOR community do not match common stereotypes or assumptions about Appalachia. The Woodford community expressed a preference for monarchism, not Trump, the GOP, or populism. Few members of the community she interacted with voted in the 2016 presidential election and she encountered some reluctance to talk about politics. These points raise a question about Riccardi-Swartz’s approach. She is absolutely right that the beliefs, rituals, and conversions of members of this community—particularly the embrace of the myth of Holy Rus’ and the liturgical veneration of Tsar Nicholas II—have political implications. Riccardi-Swartz mentions in passing that believers were focused chiefly on their salvation, but she also minimizes this point by suggesting that “these converts found in religion a way to engage with the political that used a rhetoric of spirituality to make sense of their ideologies” (183). Does her reductionist emphasis on the political misrepresent the community or detract from the community’s self-understanding of Orthodox belief and worship?

The book is engaging but would benefit from a more systematic treatment of themes like apocalypticism and from more analytical clarity. Riccardi-Swartz refers to the Woodford community’s “nostalgic apocalypticism” (e.g., 14, 78) and “apocalyptic politics” (20), noting Serafim Rose as an influential figure both in the U.S. and in Russia. But a precise, even if brief elucidation of Rose’s most influential ideas and of the apocalyptic narratives that she encountered would be

welcome. Similarly, Riccardi-Swartz uses a wide range of labels interchangeably to characterize the Woodford community, ROCOR, and “reactive Orthodoxy,” sometimes without any attempt to define these terms, especially “fascism” (45), “religio-social fascism” (128), “religio-fascist” (189).

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Elizabeth Buchanan, *Red Arctic: Russian Strategy Under Putin*, Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2023, xvi. 195pp. Index. \$37.00, Paper.

Early in her splendid short treatise on Russia’s Arctic strategy, Elizabeth Buchanan gives her readers a sly wink. She acknowledges that her book’s “doomsday-alluding” title and cover art could be viewed as “clickbait” to lure readers because they tease our latent fears of Russia and resonate with images of Red Square, Red Army, or Red Dawn (2). And that is exactly her point, and the book’s central thesis; Russia is *not* threatening to take over the Arctic, and has been a responsible Arctic power whose strategic interests incline it toward cooperation and a stable climate of commerce and investment. Yet Western perceptions are dominated by fears that Russia *is* threatening to take over the Arctic, in part because of our Cold-War hangover and in part due to spillover from confrontation with Russia in other regions. These fears may be exaggerated but unavoidable; what *can* be countered is the hyperbole and threat inflation of what Buchanan calls the “cold war camp” and the “Arctic strategic panic group” (8, 9). And that is what her book does so well, by rebutting hype with facts and placing Russia’s Arctic policies in historic and geopolitical context.

This context is what makes her work such a useful introduction to today’s Arctic politics. After an overview of the various political, historical, environmental, economic, legal and security issues at play, Buchanan gives a concise primer on Russia’s Arctic policies—from the Cold War, to post-Cold War collapse of the 1990s, to the revival of an active Arctic presence since the 2000s in a chapter that many instructors will find essential: “The Russians are Coming (Home)” (13-50). Unlike other global regions—Europe, Africa, Latin America—the Arctic is rarely studied as such and there are few degrees offered in Arctic studies. Consequently, Arctic experts (and their writings) are unusually specialized—climatologists, petroleum experts, military strategists, sociologists, etc. One rarely encounters in a single individual the expertise to appreciate Russia’s long Arctic history (and so why it is bound up with Russian identity), to understand Russia’s failed free-market democratic experiment of the 1990s (and thus why Russians resent the West and seek to reassert influence in their traditional backyard), and to command the territorial issues (and so explain why Russia’s claims to subsea Arctic resources have legal merit). Buchanan is this and more, artfully rebutting the alarmists and

answering her own question: “So what is Russia up to in the Arctic? There is a simple answer: legitimate state business.” (14).

With a majority of the Arctic coastline, as well as petroleum and mineral resources that make the Arctic crucial to their economy, Russia’s interests in the region are vital and best served by openness, cooperation, trade and investment. Yet frictions with other powers are inevitable “if the foundation of the [Western] narrative continues to include the notion that Russia lacks a legitimate majority stake in the Arctic” (14). In today’s climate of rampant Russophobia, this is a bold assertion—that we are as much to blame as the Russians for budding confrontation in the Arctic. Yet Buchanan argues it so cogently and systematically that one wishes her book could be read by all journalists and pundits who reflexively repeat the “Russia is the aggressor” narrative.

One key to dismantling this narrative is understanding how far Russia had fallen in the 1990s. It is true that Russia has for over a decade been building up a military presence in the Arctic. But two things must be grasped to put this into context. One is that with global warming and the receding of Arctic ice, growing commercial activity (including shipping across Russia’s largely undefended northern coast, a stretch of 25,000 km) means that Russia has an urgent need to build up navigation, search and rescue, Coast Guard and yes—defense capabilities too—as any other state would to defend its interests. The second factor follows from this, is that Russia’s Arctic infrastructure—research and economic, as well as military—decayed or completely shut down in the 1990s. Consequently, Russia is not adding ever-more military power from some already high level, but rebuilding from near bottom. As Buchanan puts it, “Despite apparent militarization, Moscow’s Arctic posture remains a shadow of its Cold War footprint.” (75).

In her chapter on “A New Cold War?” (134-146) Buchanan follows her detailed explication of Arctic politics over the early 2000s—covering a range of issues successfully managed either through bilateral cooperation or the multilateral Arctic Council—with changes of the Obama, Trump, and early Biden presidencies. After sanctions following Crimea’s annexation in 2014, the spillover into Arctic relations seemed manageable under the careful diplomacy of President Obama. The Trump Administration took an aggressive stance against not only Russian but also Chinese and even Canadian Arctic policies—and for good measure offended Denmark with a fantastical proposal to purchase Greenland. Under the Biden Administration, the US is more systematically engaging the Arctic, “albeit led by its armed forces” (143). Here Buchanan details the expansion of US and NATO military Arctic activities over 2020-2022, something that has only accelerated since the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine (which began just after *Red Arctic* was completed).

Unfortunately for great-power relations in the Arctic, the war has frozen Russian-Western cooperation and supercharged NATO assertion—including the accession of long-neutral Finland and Sweden (the latter expected in late 2023) into the alliance. Heightened confrontation is unfortunate in a fragile region that needs as much stakeholder resources and cooperation to deal with urgent climate-

related crises. In an afterward, Buchanan warned of militarization leading to an “Arctic meltdown” and notes still another unintended consequence that may be looming: Western spurning of Russian development projects has opened the door for Middle Eastern and Asian countries to replace them. She asks, “Punishing Russia in the Arctic is already giving China a blank check to start rewriting the Arctic rulebook. Is the West ready to deter Chinese strategy? Capabilitywise, is Washington even able to respond?” (163)

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Alfred J. Rieber, *Stalin as Warlord*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2022, xii, 376 pp. Chronology, Index. \$38.00 Hardcover.

This book is the product of many years of studying the USSR and its leadership. Its balanced and well documented analysis outlines the different aspects of Stalin’s achievements and errors at the helm of the Soviet Union, with a particular emphasis on the time before, during, and after the Second World War. Rieber’s monograph complements recent studies of the USSR at war such as the books by Geoffrey Roberts, Simon Sebag Montefiore, and Sean McMeekin. Rieber’s advantage is underscored in his ability to look back on the long historiography of his subject, personal experience in the USSR, and his careful and reserved judgment. His focus on the war does not prevent him from spending time and space on prewar and postwar policy decisions.

For Rieber, the Soviet leader was no mystical demon nor a miracle worker. Indeed, Stalin’s style is characterized as being “ambiguous and controversial” (5). He shared the Bolsheviks’ disregard for expertise and believed that coercion and discipline would transform society and defend the Soviet system, regardless of the sacrifices. Violence and terror at every juncture: these were the Communist recipes for survival. In retrospect, the disdain for management and education becomes clearer since the Bolshevik leaders had lived underground or in exile much of their lives and the only knowledge they acquired was of the Russian Imperial penal system. Rieber points out that government by coercion necessarily led to enormous errors and wrong directions. Faced with economic challenges, the tendency was to liquidate managers and officials, then appropriate some of their ideas and policies. (45) Similar purges decimated the military, allowing for disastrous losses at the hands of Nazi Germany. Rieber incorporates the latest archival revelations and the historiography into a highly satisfactory account.

Wily and cunning in dealing with foreign leaders, Stalin remained vulnerable to consider himself the expert in nearly everything, with disastrous consequences. Apparently, he “took a close personal interest in weapons procurement” (45), read all the dispatches from the embassies abroad and micromanaged the NKVD. Killing off experienced Comintern cadres, for example, “weakened the ability

of the left to resist Hitler in Eastern Europe” (81). But Rieber maintains that Khrushchev’s account of Stalin suffering a shock when Nazi Germany invaded has to be treated with caution as a second-hand account. The fall of Minsk a week later, however, resulted in a deep depression (88). Stalin’s friendship with Hitler cost millions of lives, and nearly led to the collapse of the Communist system.

For a while, his meddling with the military cost the USSR just as dearly as Hitler’s involvement in German operations, and the Soviet leader issued several absurd orders. “Stalin’s record as a warlord was paradoxical on a gigantic scale” (268). Eventually he took a backseat and allowed the Soviet generals a bit more leeway. He focused on channeling the “spontaneous upsurge of patriotism” into support for him and the Communist Party (217). Although able to defeat the German onslaught, the Soviet command system remained dysfunctional, in Rieber’s eyes. “The party was in disarray; the schools in a parlous condition; the collective farm system in a shambles; wayward tendencies in the intelligentsia abounded; the industrial plan was in need of conversion from military exigencies to a civilian economy” (223). Postwar policies revealed the previous pattern of “a course marked by paradox at every turn”(56).

In some ways, the victory in the “Great Patriotic War” was pyrrhic, Rieber maintains. It condemned Soviet society to another batch of repressions and economic crises. Stalin’s successors “failed to break the dead hand” of the dictator in subsequent decades and his legacy remains a burden. (268)

Some of the chapters may have benefitted from a more stringent chronology, the narrative often jumps around between the 1930s and 1950s and causes a bit of “flashback fatigue.” But Rieber’s analysis is well suited for a graduate seminar and the general public to better understand an often-mythologized figure of the 20th century.

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Andrew L. Jenks, *Collaboration in Space and the Search for Peace on Earth*, New York: Anthem Press, 2022, 171pp. Index. \$125, Cloth.

The popular television series *For All Mankind* posits an alternative history timeline in which the USSR beats the US to the moon, landing a male cosmonaut on the lunar surface in 1969 and the first woman shortly thereafter. In this fictional universe, NASA responds to political pressure by fast-tracking women into the astronaut corps and positions in engineering and mission control. Gender dynamics are a key preoccupation as the series unfolds. Several storylines focus on female characters challenging traditional barriers. But writers also used the fictionalized past to explore varieties of masculinity in a Cold War setting marked by competition and its attendant hostilities.

While much of the action in *For All Mankind* is pure fiction, the central dilemma of season two, episode 6 (first aired on March 26, 2021) highlights a gender culture conundrum that springs from fact. The episode focuses on the Apollo-Soyuz mission – the historic “handshake” in space that happened in real life on July 17, 1975. It opens with the Soviet team arriving in Houston to work out details for the planned rendezvous. Issues of nomenclature (cosmonaut vs astronaut) and billing (Apollo-Soyuz vs Soyuz-Apollo) get sorted with relative ease. The sharing of communication encryption protocols was a trickier business, ultimately overcome by growing trust. But the real sticking point was the docking mechanism itself. Standard systems involved one craft taking an “active” position and the other a “passive” one. Since neither side wanted its spacecraft to be perceived as weaker, the leaders of the two teams meet in secret to design an androgynous system that wouldn’t threaten masculine prowess.

Andrew L. Jenks’s informative new book examines the real-life quandaries confronted by Soviet and American engineers working on the Apollo-Soyuz Test Project (ASTP) in the early 1970s. Jenks, whose prior work includes a 2012 investigation of Yuri Gagarin’s life and legend, doesn’t shy away from identifying threatened masculinity as one aspect of the problem: “existing docking systems... involved one spaceship (the male) penetrating the other (the female).” (76) As the reader discovers, particularly in Chapter Three, the reason ASTP’s androgynous mechanism came into being was because the men working on the project found “a way to relate to each other based on mutual respect and equality rather than seeing a relationship of domination and submission.” (67) The process of collaboration itself was the critical element.

Drawing from an impressive range of archival and published sources in Russian and English, Jenks employs thick description to investigate ASTP and other “episodes of scientific, technological, cultural, and political interchanges” involving cooperation in space. In doing so, he highlights the successes of Soviet-American space collaboration and considers their broader implications.

Jenks bills his project as “an alternative history of the Space Age,” not in the sense of speculative fiction, but as an exercise in historical reinterpretation. Rather than reinforcing standard “us vs them” superpower dynamics, Jenks argues that ASTP provided a bridge between the highly competitive, dangerous, and astronomically expensive imperatives of the early “space race” and détente-era collaborations that prioritized peace, openness, science and safety.

It is refreshing to read a historical study that focuses on space exploration and engineering as a means “to unite people across ideologies and cultures and to replace the zero-sum politics of the Cold War with the win-win politics of collaboration.” (9) Jenks posits the view that those involved in developing joint space technology programs offered an alternative narrative, one that foregrounded peace rather than advancing militarization. The heroes of Jenks’s story include NASA Administrator Tom Paine, Soviet Academy of Sciences President Mstislav Keldysh, and especially Vladimir Syromiatnikov, “the lead docking engineer for the Soviet side” in the ASTP project who Jenks dubs “the Buddha of docking.” (77)

Jenks spends time in Chapter Two documenting the joint efforts of cosmonauts and astronauts to promote peaceful exploration and international collaboration in space. In the late 1970s, Aleksei Leonov joined forces with retired astronauts Edgar Mitchell and Russell Schweickart to found the Association of Space Explorers (ASE). Stymied by Ronald Reagan's White House, the group turned to promoting its goals in Europe, particularly France. ASE opened its membership to spacefarers from other countries. Carl Sagan and the French explorer Jacques-Yves Cousteau make cameo appearances. Another fascinating episode involved the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, which "brought Zen masters from San Francisco together with Soviet shamans and faith healers" to explore the possibilities of uniting humanity through "direct satellite linkups between the United States and the Soviet Union." Practitioners of ESP and its Soviet cousin 'ekstrasens' were also involved. (65)

Jenks saves his most provocative conclusions for the final chapter. Contrary to popular belief, Jenks argues that Soviets involved in collaborative space efforts became more open and transparent in the 1970s and 1980s, well before the Gorbachev era. Meanwhile on the American side, advocates of international cooperation in space were increasingly hamstrung by demands for secrecy and fears of technology transfer. These findings challenge established notions of America as "collaborative and open to the world and the Soviet Union as closed and secretive." (3)

Jenks's book compels readers to consider the implications of this seeming role reversal. His claims about the scope of the decline of secrecy on the Soviet side are perhaps overstated. That reservation aside, Jenks has put on the table an excellent piece of scholarship sure to spark discussion in space history, diplomatic history, and history of technology and culture circles. Those interested in peace studies and gender and technology will also find the work intriguing.

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Bertrand M. Patenaude and Joan Nabseth Stevenson, *Bread and Medicine: American Famine Relief in Soviet Russia, 1921-1923*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2023, xviii, 126pp. Index. \$39.95. Paper.

In the years that followed the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, pain and turmoil followed for most Russians culminating in the famine years of the early 1920s. While Lenin and his comrades had won the revolution and seized power, the problems they faced were monumental. By 1921, it was clear that Lenin needed outside help to prevent the famine from becoming even worse which opened the door for the American Relief Administration (ARA) led by Herbert Hoover to operate in Soviet Russia for two years from the summer of 1921 to the summer of 1923. This story has been examined by scholars for some time, but it is still

a fascinating one. One of the leading scholars on this topic, Bertrand Patenaude (Hoover Institution), has joined forces with the independent scholar Joan Nabseth Stevenson to produce this new work, *Bread and Medicine*. It is an oversized book full of several dozen photographs and other images from the rich archives at the Hoover Institution on the American Relief Administration. This volume is designed to accompany an exhibition held in 2023 at the Hoover Institution that focuses on the ARA Medical Division.

While food relief was well known for the ARA, it was also accompanied by a team of medical personnel to help with disease issues ranging from treating those with diseases to working in towns and villages on issues of sanitation, water safety, hygiene, and vaccination. By the summer of 1922, this team of medical personnel seemed to reach their peak number of about forty people spread across Soviet Russia. The book is organized into seven chapters. The first chapter retells the story of how the ARA was allowed into Soviet Russia and complications of that arrangement on both sides. Once it was agreed, though, Hoover moved fast to deploy teams into Russia by late summer and early fall of 1921. The combination of starvation and disease were devastating some parts of the countryside, so the ARA was moving fast to head off diseases with devastating results like typhus and cholera. The ARA had several years of experience in postwar central Europe, so they were able to mobilize quickly.

The ARA districts were established in Ukraine, Belarus, and areas to the east of Moscow in regions of Samara, Saratov, and Kazan. They also included Moscow and Petrograd (as St. Petersburg was still called at that time). The authors address the problems of a lack of medical supplies and local medical personnel and then the horrors of typhus and cholera in several of their chapters. The images and documents the authors included from the ARA archives at the Hoover Institution help present the picture of the anguishing time. The images are simply extraordinary.

In the later chapters of the book, the authors address the plight of the doctors themselves. They encountered hardships of travel, food, and weather. They also faced more serious issues like resistance to treatment, fatigue, and contraction of the diseases that were so communicable. The book concludes with the exit of the ARA, an overall evaluation the ARA, and the importance of the Medical Division.

The reader will not mistake this for a new monograph on the ARA. Patenaude's book, *Big Show in Bololand* (2002), still stands at the standard on that subject, but this work from Patenaude and Stevenson is an excellent use of the Hoover Institution's collection on the ARA in conjunction with their exhibition. This provides those who are able to visit the exhibit, and perhaps more importantly those who are not, an excellent narrative about the Medical Division of the ARA and an excellent visual sample of the holdings of the ARA archives at the Hoover Institution.

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