



TOBIAS KÖLLNER:

Religion and Politics in Contemporary Russia. Beyond the Binary of Power and Authority

London and New York: Routledge, 2021, 178 p.

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Tobias Köllner's book addresses an important and widely discussed topic in the social sciences: 'religion and politics', based upon observations on contemporary Russia. Among the many titles, Köllner's monograph is characterized by a careful balance between theoretical innovation and empirical credibility, brought together with ethnographic methods well-established in anthropology. The author prioritises the local perspective in his study, taking a realistic view vis-à-vis central state policies. The book draws on solid fieldwork in central Russian regions. Its factual credibility is enhanced by the inclusion of twenty photographs in the text. The fieldwork was carried out in the period 2013 – 2016 in Vladimir and St. Petersburg (latter as a corrective). This is the author's second field study, after the first (2006 – 2008), the results of which were presented in his debut book (Köllner, 2012). In other words, the author has considerable research experience in the anthropology of Orthodox Christianity in Russia.

The theoretical point of departure in the study is Max Weber's dichotomy of power vs authority (Weber, 1990: 122–176), which Köllner relativizes based on his empirical findings. In the context of contemporary Russian Orthodoxy, the author shows the problematic nature of Weber's understanding of authority as a legitimization of political power. Instead, Köllner shows the ambivalent nature of the interaction between the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) (the whole of clergy and laity) and contemporary Russian politics and proposes the term 'entangled authorities'. The next distinction is between personal, ideological and institutional entanglement. From a local perspective, the relationship between political power and Orthodoxy as the main social actors in today's Russia is characterized by mutually beneficial cooperation, but also by competition for access to resources and even open conflict. Overall, the monograph's introductory chapter can serve as a competent guide to the study of religion by contemporary social scientists.

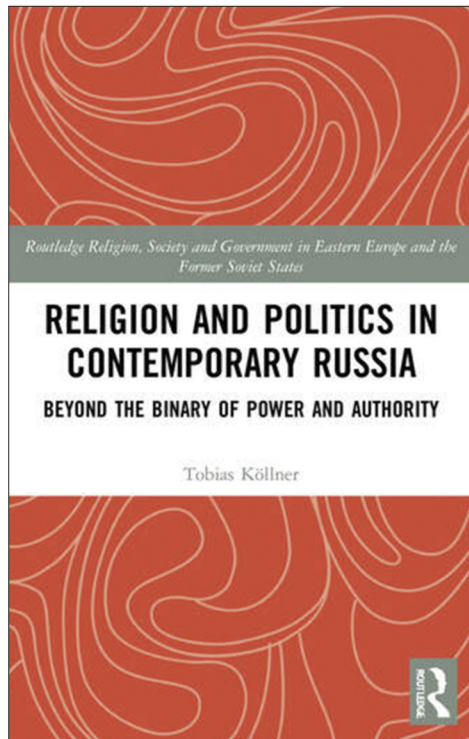
The seven chapters of the study are devoted to: the introduction of religious instruction (2012) in state schools – *Foundations of Orthodox Culture* (chapter three); the restitution of church property (chapter four); the introduction (2008) of the feast of *Family, Love and Faithfulness Day* (chapter five); religious conservatism in the context of nationalism and militarism in Russian society (chapter six). The first and last chapters contain, respectively, the introduction and conclusion of the book. The second chapter contains an historical overview of the relationship between Orthodoxy and Russian politics, from the conversion of Kievan Rus to the present day.

The introduction of religious instruction by presidential decree (2012, *Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture*) is for many authors a signal of state favouritism of Orthodoxy among other confessions and its becoming a “state religion”. The author shows in a local perspective that state support does not automatically guarantee the solution of problems and challenges in the Russian educational environment, also in the church as an institution. From 2006 onwards, fierce debates in the Russian media challenged the legitimacy of religious education. Köllner’s analysis reveals the reasons: a shortage of trained specialists with pedagogical education and religious competence. In practice, the subject is taught either by priests with no pedagogical training, or by teachers with no religious training or a background in scientific atheism. For not a few parents, the introduction of this subject signals the ‘clericalisation of education’. Despite legislative protections, Russia’s multi-ethnic environment confronts unequal treatment of students of

different religious backgrounds. On the other hand, there is no unanimity in the clergy about the content of the subject Foundations of Orthodox Culture. Vladimir and the district is also a suitable field for the study of private religious education: the Orthodox high schools. There are nine of them in the Vladimir diocese (for comparison – there are two in the Kaluga diocese). The Orthodox high schools testify to the broad spectrum of ROC’s educational strategies. The interaction between the state and the clergy at the local level shows the mechanisms of the entangled authorities: by cooperating, competing and intertwining, they remain independent.

The sixth chapter, on religious conservatism, is crucial not only for understanding contemporary Russian Orthodoxy but also for understanding the mood of Russian society in the second decade of the third millennium. This chapter analyses the church’s involvement in pre-military (or paramilitary) instruction of children (military-patriotic clubs). Nationalism and militarism are points of contact in the ideological convergence between contemporary Russian Orthodoxy and political power, especially after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. The author provides clear empirical evidence and an adequate interpretation of the issue. Reasonably, he also addresses the issue of the participation of the Cossacks – a military movement – in various religious initiatives with nationalist (the author calls it patriotic) and military orientation.

The presentation of the Cossacks in the analysis (Köllner, 2021, 145–148) is one of the examples of the author’s ability to analyse sensitive issues such as militarism, anti-Western sentiments, xenophobia, etc. Without glossing over them, he manages to present them neutrally, without being judgmental. Caution has sometimes prevented him from being clear to the end, as in his mentions of the Cossacks, for example. Köllner correctly notes that today’s Cossack movement developed outside the geographical regions of pre-revolutionary Cossacks



(southern Russia, Ukraine and Siberia). However, this designation in contemporary Russia denotes, in addition to the historical Cossacks, military formations that took part in the military conflicts at the collapse of the Soviet Union, including Russia's current war with Ukraine. The author also introduces the 'Council for Religious Affairs' with caution, leaving aside its affiliation with the KGB. Furthermore, Köllner repeatedly notes the deep entanglement on a personal level between political authorities and the church. The use of personal connections indicates an important mechanism of social interactions in Russia, far beyond the relationship between 'politics and religion'. It can also be denoted by other terms such as the operation of social networks or clientelism.

The monograph by Tobias Köllner is an in-depth insight not only into the relationship between "politics and religion", but also into the fabric of everyday life in Russia. Dedicated to the public aspects of Orthodoxy, the study offers a comprehensive view of its contemporary state. The book is a significant and memorable contribution, both theoretical and empirical, to the anthropology of Christianity as a whole.

MILENA BENOVSKA,
South-West University of Blagoevgrad

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DARA HORNOVÁ:

Lidé milují Židy mrtvé. Zprávy z děsivé přítomnosti

[People Love Dead Jews: Reports from a Haunted Present]

Prague: Kalich, 2023, 200 p.

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Thousands of Years of Experience

In her new book *People Love Dead Jews: Reports from a Haunted Present*,¹ Dara Horn presents twelve essays that critically examine various current issues facing the contemporary Jewish community. From the very first page, she demonstrates her intent to attract attention not only with a provocative title, but also with unconventional, often controversial, yet always interes-

1 The author of the review read the publication in the Czech edition and translation; the original was published by W. W. Norton in New York in 2021 (editor's note).