

**Nicholas E. Denysenko.** *The Orthodox Church in Ukraine: A Century of Separation.* Northern Illinois UP, 2018. xvi, 298 pp. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$39.00, paper.

**B**ooks can be good and important because they are well researched or because they contain a great deal of material or because they present the overall history of a subject. Another reason—when they appear at the right moment. This study of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church(es) in the twentieth century by Father Nicholas E. Denysenko brings together most of these features. It offers us new insights into the history of Orthodoxy in Ukraine; it combines elements that are not usually researched within one context; and it came out at the right time, exactly when the crisis in Ukrainian Orthodoxy escalated in 2018-19.

The book contains five main chapters. Chapter 1 (13-58) discusses the events after 1917 and the formation of the autocephalous Church, the so-called *samosviati* 'self-ordainers,' who got their name from the fact that, from the point of view of Orthodox ecclesiology, their ordinations were invalid owing to the absence of episcopal participation. This Church was soon suppressed by the Soviet authorities and was officially liquidated in 1930. Chapter 2 (59-94) is dedicated to Ukrainian Orthodoxy during World War II, and it starts very convincingly in 1939. The lacuna of the intervening nine years is an indicator of the religious situation in the USSR in the 1930s. The forms of underground and illegal church life (which without a doubt existed) in that decade have not left much trace in the archives and sources. During the war years, Ukrainian Orthodoxy largely depended on German politics in the occupied areas. The presence of Ukrainian Orthodox Church structures in North America is the subject of chapter 3 (95-134), which abandons the chronological approach. The author describes their beginnings, the influx of Ukrainian believers after World War II, and their development over the past decades, during which these Churches came under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Chapter 4 (135-60) deals with the time after the war, up to 1988, which was the millennium of the "baptism" of Kyivan Rus'. But this anniversary also symbolized the change in Soviet religious politics and the end of persecution. Accordingly, the last chapter, chapter 5 (161-208), discusses events up to 2016. Thus, the Maidan, the annexation of the Crimea, and the war in the Donbas were incorporated into the study, but not the events of and after 2018. The author, in his "Conclusion" (209-26), conceptualizes some of the core terms of his research (which characterize the development of Ukrainian Orthodoxy over the past one hundred years) as modernization, Ukrainization, canonicity, and other notions.

The book presents a fascinating story about its subject. There is special merit in the fact that it considers the overall history of Ukrainian Orthodoxy, by combining the church history of Ukraine itself with that of the diaspora. It becomes very clear how intertwined both branches of Ukrainian Orthodoxy are and how much impact the Church in the emigration had on events in Ukraine—much more than in other cases (in Russian Orthodoxy, Polish Catholicism, and Latvian Lutheranism, the diaspora Churches also interacted with the ones in their respective homelands, but they had much less influence on them).

The book stimulates reflection on some issues in modern Ukrainian Church history (another one of its merits). For instance, it is instructive, and somehow also striking, to see how in the newer history of Ukraine, ecclesial decisions repeatedly had to be made very quickly and in very turbulent times. When a body must decide on matters of utmost importance (and, of course, without having knowledge of the final outcome), it has to make determinations on the basis of limited information, but the decisions made will take effect and endure. So, it makes a difference in our understanding whether a decision was made after long discussions and deliberations or under time pressure.

Another important element of Church history is the question of the liturgical language. Already very early, the demand emerged for the use of Ukrainian. Ukrainization, however, did not refer only to language. It also incorporated other elements, such as a greater influence of the faithful on Church life, which included matters relating to the election of priests, the handling of finances, and the existence of a regular synodal structure in Church government. All of these demands during the years around the 1917 Revolution were directed against the Russian domination of the Church, and this drive had its parallel in the political aspirations of Ukraine.

I would disagree with the author about one point when he deals with the contemporary situation—that is, with his understanding of the concept of the *Russkii mir* 'Russian World.' It seems to me that this notion no longer has the significance that it did a couple of years ago. It did not actually stimulate the politics of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) but, rather, served as an ex post explanation of ROC policies. It was, in fact, the events in Ukraine that caused the "Russian World" to fail. The idea of an East Slavic civilization marked by Orthodoxy and a common history does not work without Ukraine—and Ukraine has decided to go in a different direction. This fact is also understood in Moscow, and therefore, the term *Russkii mir* is hardly used anymore in official ROC documents.

The book is based on a good knowledge of the relevant sources and literature on the topic. However, the author does not use the important

studies by Mikhail Shkarovskii when examining religious politics during the German occupation. And in some instances, consulting archives in Ukraine could have made for a stronger argument (especially in chapter 4, which deals with the Cold War period).

However, these critical remarks do not diminish the value of the book. History will determine where the path of Ukrainian Orthodoxy (nowadays, it might be better to speak of “Orthodoxies”) will lead. This study is a valuable instrument for understanding whence it came.

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