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ALEXANDRA TAKOVA. “Praying Muslim Youth” as a Subculture of Kabardino-Balkar Society

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Curriculum vitae: Religious and Social Life in the Russian Regions

Review of: Religious and Social Life in the Russian Regions. Vol. 1 / Ed. S. Filatov. Moscow: Letnii Sad, 2014. — 620 pages.

Religious and Social Life in the Russian Regions. Vol. 2 / Ed.

S. Filatov. Moscow, Saint Petersburg: Letnii Sad, 2016. — 512 pages.

Introduction

The second volume of the Russian-British project *Religious and Social Life in the Russian Regions* appeared in March of 2016. It is the eleventh work to be published through the joint efforts of representatives of the Russian academic community and the Keston Institute under the auspices of a foundational research project entitled the “Encyclopedia of Contemporary Religious Life in Russia.” Since they began working together in 1997, this international team of authors has released published works such as: *Religion and Society: Essays on Contemporary Religious Life in*

Russia (Moscow, Saint Petersburg, 2002); *Contemporary Religious Life in Russia: An Experiment in Systematic Description* (vols. 1–4, 2003–2006); *An Atlas of Contemporary Religious Life in Russia* (vols. 1–3, 2005–2009); *Religion and Russian Diversity* (Moscow, Saint Petersburg, 2012); and *Religious and Social Life in the Russian Regions* (vol. 1, 2014).

This team’s work in the 2000s consisted of an effort to “familiarize the reader with the aspects of religious life in our country which are not well known or are not known at all,” and its published works were largely designed to provide reference information on religious organizations (full names, number of members, leadership, address, contact information,

The Russian version was previously published in: *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov’ v Rossii i za rubezhom*, 2016, 34 (2): 357–372.

etc.).¹ Their published works in the 2010s, however, are aimed at presenting historical and analytical information, and specifically describing the main trends in religious and social life in the Russian regions. According to the participants in the project, this shift in emphasis from the informational to the analytical was primarily conditioned by the spread of internet access in Russia. Increased high-speed internet coverage has made it easier for the population to access information on religious organizations and communities and has eliminated the urgent demand for specialized informational/reference books; that information is now just a few clicks away. Technological progress has not, however, eliminated the need to parse sources, conduct conscientious analyses and lay out the information in a compact form. The team of authors behind *Religious and Social Life in the Russian Regions* have set out to overcome these obstacles and lay out the main trends in the development of religious and social life.

Structure

The structure used to present the material in the books that make

1. M. Burdo and S. Filatov, eds. 2005. *An Atlas of Contemporary Religious Life in Russia*, vol. 1 (Moscow, St. Petersburg: Letnii Sad), 7.

up the *Religious and Social Life in the Russian Regions* project is somewhat different from the earlier design that was used in *An Atlas of Contemporary Religious Life in Russia*. While the *Atlas* grouped the regions in the same way that the Constitution of the Russian Federation does (alphabetically, beginning with the republics, then the krais and then the oblasts), the new book presents all of the subjects in a single, alphabetized list. The first volume lays out the situation in nineteen regions of the Russian Federation, from *A* (the Republic of Adygea) to *I* (the Republic of Ingushetia), while the second discusses religious and social life in fourteen more Russian regions, from *I* (Irkutsk Oblast) to *K* (Krasnodar Krai). This design was a more suitable choice for the encyclopedic nature of the project, although it does involve certain difficulties for both the writers and the reader.

First of all, arranging the subjects alphabetically required the researchers conducting interviews with local insiders to incur substantial travel costs, since regions of Russia that all begin with the letter *A* (the Amur, Archangelsk, and Astrakhan Oblasts, for example) might be thousands of kilometers apart. Secondly, the (often diametric) contrasts between the religious and societal conditions prevailing

in regions that are adjacent in this sequence might lead to confusion for the reader and make it more difficult to master the material. When presented in this format, the federal subjects are torn from their geographical, economic, sociopolitical and cultural context, which makes it more difficult to comprehend the ongoing processes in the regions and compare religious and social life in neighboring regions. It also does not facilitate explaining the multifaceted nature of the conflicts that have taken shape as a result of discrepancies between secular and religious administrative and territorial boundaries. Furthermore, after being immersed in the specifics of religious and social life in one federal subject, it is not a simple matter to switch one's consciousness over to the task of understanding the unique features of another region, which is radically different from the previous one and is practically on the other side of the globe.

In view of this factor, it might have been more logical to arrange the numerous regions of Russia by federal district, rather than alphabetically. Choosing this strategy would have reduced the logistical expenses involved in gathering materials, since the researchers would not have had to travel from one end of the country to the other while writing each

chapter; instead, they could have systematically visited neighboring regions of each federal district. At the same time, the information on each federal district could have been presented in a separate book (there are eight federal districts in the Russian Federation, not counting Crimea, and plans for this project call for the publication of seven whole volumes). Furthermore, grouping regions according to federal district would also have helped the reader categorize the information and develop a cohesive idea of religious and social life in the Russian regions, rather than a fragmented one. In this fashion, regions with relatively similar geographical, economic, and cultural conditions would have been presented as groups, which would have minimized the contrast among them and simplified the process of assimilating the realities laid out by the authors.

Another argument in favor of selecting the proposed scholarly design is the fact that the group of authors themselves did not strictly adhere to their alphabetizing strategy in how they presented the material. This principle is violated in the very first volume, in which information about the "matryoshka region" of Archangelsk Oblast, the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, which is simultaneously a federal subject of the Russian Federation and a

component of Archangelsk Oblast, is presented. Furthermore, plans call for the data on the religious and social situation in the federal city of Moscow to be presented in a way that deviates from the strategy the researchers selected.

The chapters of the published works under consideration are thirty- to forty- page informational and analytical articles that expound on religious and social life in the regions, broken down by the religious groups present there. Structurally, the text of every article is divided into several sections devoted to specific concepts: features of the historical development of religion in the region/the Russian Orthodox Church/Alternative Orthodox Churches/the Roman Catholic Church/Protestant Churches/Judaism/Islam/Buddhism/Paganism/Neopaganism. In some cases, the chapters conclude with bibliographical lists. In that event, the section dealing with the Russian Orthodox Church includes the following subsections: Organizational Structure/ Features of Diocesan Life/ Government Religious Policy and the Russian Orthodox Church/ Membership/Educational Institutions/Monasticism.

The sections on the Russian Orthodox Church (along with those on Islam in traditionally Muslim regions) and Protestant churches are the most extensive.

There is justification for this imbalance. It lies not so much in the writers' efforts to present a detailed explanation of the relationships between regional authorities and representatives of the religious groups that are most widespread in Russia (the number of Protestants in Russia fluctuates between 500,000 and 2 million depending on how it is calculated, which significantly changes their position in any "ranking" of religious groups) but rather in their desire to reflect the real significance of specific religious communities in Russian public and political life. One can also detect a shortcoming in this framing of the question, however, which is associated with the traditional focus of Russian religious studies on Orthodoxy and Islam at the expense of expounding information on less numerous and less well-known religious groups.

Contents

It seems likely that the sections on the "Features of Diocesan Life" and "Government Religious Policy and the Russian Orthodox Church" will be most interesting for a significant portion of readers, since it is there that an analytical vision of the main tendencies shaping changes in religious and social life in the Russian regions is presented.

The sections on the “Features of Diocesan Life” provide a relatively short, yet content-rich picture of the primary features of Church life in the Russian regions and the disagreements present within the Church. The materials laid out in the book shed light on the reasons for the attempts under Patriarch Kirill to strengthen the hierarchical power structure within the Church and make Church life more bureaucratic. According to the vision presented in the book, these efforts are rooted in the determination to rein in the radically inclined element of the clergy and increase control over the enormous and poorly managed Church machine, which is being torn apart from the inside out by religious, ideological, financial, and ethical contradictions. As the writers note in the first volume of *Religious and Social Life in the Russian Regions*: “the growth of Orthodox activism is paralleled by the growth of self-consciousness among the clergy and laymen who support Orthodox positions and of the diversity of positions, discussions, and ideological conflicts. The Russian Orthodox Church is becoming a field for debates not only about strictly ecclesiastical questions, but also about questions of social and political significance. Often against the

wishes of Church leadership, the Church is becoming the sphere in which ideological and moral positions collide” (vol. 1, pg. 4).

After reading the sections on “Government Policy and the Russian Orthodox Church,” one is left with a persistent desire to question the thesis being promoted by government agencies that there is unity and affinity between the Russian regions and to praise the regional studies experts who are duty bound to make sense of the complexities and vicissitudes of every region of the country. It is difficult to imagine how the information on religious and social life in the various federal subjects that became part of the published works under review could have been presented in a generalized form, since the situation that has taken shape in each region is unique in its own way, and any attempt at generalization would inevitably lead to a loss of authentic elements and repetition of the obvious.

A few points about the list of characteristics ascribed to all of the federal subjects analyzed in the books are worth noting:

1. There is no such thing as centralized religious policy in the Russian Federation. The regional authorities attempt to determine the general intentions of the federal center and copy federal practices for conducting dialogue

with religious organizations; however, due to the lack of a clearly articulated position and standardized criteria for evaluating these efforts, the form and intensity of relationships between regional authorities and religious organizations diverge significantly. A similar situation can be observed inside the religious body of the Russian Orthodox Church, where responsibility for communication between the metropolitanate and the local authorities rests entirely with the regional church hierarchs.

2. State-confessional dialogue has a place in all of the regions presented here, but the names of the institutions responsible for supporting and controlling it, their position in the staffing/organizational structure and the influence they exert on the political decision-making process vary between the various federal subjects.

3. The intensity, focus, and effectiveness of local state-confessional dialogue are directly dependent on the individual attitudes of state and Church officials making decisions, rather than their party affiliations.

The retrospectives presented in this book on the transformations of religious and social life in the regions after a new governor or church hierarch take office illustrate this point perfectly.

At the same time, the party affiliation and ideological views of a governor, mayor, or other person responsible for relations with religious organizations do not play a significant role in determining the position of regional authorities on religious questions. Thus, for the last two decades, in some regions the Communists have spoken out against proselytism and strengthening the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church (Kaluga and Kirov Oblasts), while in others they have supported the Russian Orthodox Church instead (Amur Oblast and Kamchatka Krai). In others still, the Communists have come into conflict with less powerful religious groups (the Republic of Karelia), or the governors and Church hierarchs have managed to radically reevaluate attitudes toward both religion and Soviet power during the course of their terms in office (the Republic of Altai, Bryansk Oblast). In their turn, the “democratic” forces have spoken out in favor of government neutrality on religious questions in some regions (Kaliningrad Oblast) and supported the Russian Orthodox Church in others (Astrakhan and Volgograd Oblasts, and the Republic of Karelia).

4. According to the examples described in these published works, the religious policies

of regional authorities can be divided into two types: Orthodox/patriotic and judiciously pro-Orthodox.

The Orthodox/patriotic type envisages instituting pro-Orthodox policies, allocating funds for the needs of the Russian Orthodox Church, facilitating the development of Orthodox organizations and independent activity, actively introducing representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church into the organizational structure of the armed forces and educational institutions, persecuting other religious groups (especially new religious movements and Protestant communities), etc. (Belgorod Oblast). At the same time, the implementation of this policy does not require the governor to profess Orthodoxy or hold pro-Orthodox views (Voronezh Oblast under Vladimir Kulakov, Kemerovo Oblast, the Republic of Komi under Yuri Spiridonov, Krasnodar Krai during Governor Nikolai Kondratenko's second term).

Judiciously pro-Orthodox policy is characterized by a generally positive attitude toward Orthodoxy, accompanied by a loyal or neutral attitude toward the other religious groups in a given region, and modest financial support for initiatives by the Russian Orthodox Church (the Republic of Altai, Volgograd

Oblast, the Republic of Kalmykia, Kirov Oblast, Krasnoyarsk Krai under Alexander Khloponin).

The litmus test for the religious policy being carried out by the authorities in a given region is their attitude toward the Protestant communities functioning there; if the Protestants are being persecuted, then Orthodox/patriotic rhetoric is being pursued, but if the Protestants are "overlooked" by the authorities, then the pro-Orthodox position is most likely a restrained one.

5. The primary types of work underway in the dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church are as follows: constructing an effective financial and economic system, raising the educational level of the clergy, and organizing active social work with various categories of the population. In recent decades, the Russian Orthodox Church has been most successful in precisely those areas, although the intensity and quality of the social services provided by the Russian Orthodox Church still lags far behind analogous activity by Protestant churches.

The thoroughness and detail that characterize the information laid out in the sections dealing with Protestant churches in the regions of Russia deserve special mention. The group of writers put quality work into this part of the project; they structured the

numerous Protestant groups and provided detailed descriptions of the specifics of their accommodation and relationships with the regional authorities. This part of the text will be useful and interesting for both specialists in the fields of state-confessional relations and the sociology of religion, and anyone interested in Protestantism in general and Russian Protestantism in particular. The main thesis of the sections dedicated to the status of representatives of this religion in Russia was voiced by Roman Lunkin at the presentation of the second volume at the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences: "Protestantism has taken up a strong position in Russia, though this fact has not been fully recognized in either religious or political terms."

The Authorities and the Russian Orthodox Church

Another aspect of this book's significance for the academic community lies in the fact that the materials it presents on religious and social life in the Russian regions include extensive evidence against the widespread opinion that the Russian Orthodox Church and the state authorities are united. Analysis of the retrospectives on state-confessional policy on a local level demonstrates that

the secular authorities and the Russian Orthodox Church are not so much allies as temporary fellow-travelers, each of which always expects the other to violate their arrangements and therefore attempts to maximize its own advantage at the other's expense.

For the authorities, the turn toward Orthodoxy was, in many ways, conditioned by a tactical orientation toward the "pro-Orthodox consensus" that had been established in society, a pragmatic bet on Orthodoxy as a "spiritual bond," a factor that would serve to consolidate society and minimize the consequences of post-Soviet anomie. The case studies of Belgorod Oblast, Krasnodar Krai under Alexander Tkachov, Krasnoyarsk Krai under Alexander Lebed, and Kaliningrad Oblast function as engaging examples of the construction of a new Orthodox identity binding regional communities together.

Within the Russian Orthodox Church, the warming of relationships with the authorities was perceived as a means to increase the Church's role in society, regain the property and status lost due to the revolution, and consequently facilitate their efforts to save souls. During the first stages of the Russian Orthodox Church's proselytizing efforts, the emphasis was placed on strengthening the

processes of desecularization and penetration by the Church into various institutions and spheres of society, habituating society to the presence of priests and the existence of the Church's opinions in the informational space.

Yet the common direction that the Russian Orthodox Church and the secular authorities have shared in recent decades has hidden a fundamental divergence of goals and values among the participants in this tandem structure. The secular authorities view this religious resource as a way to facilitate making society more manageable by improving its moral and psychological condition and minimizing the expenditures necessary for social services. The authorities do not need a strong and independent Church; they need a healthy, controllable society. Therefore, making the Russian Orthodox Church stronger is regarded as a measure to be taken out of necessity. This idea has been explicitly voiced by many statesmen; like the head of the Division for Communications with Public and Religious Organizations of the Department of Internal Policy of the government of Voronezh Oblast during the governorship of Vladimir Kulakov, Alexander Zaitsev, who stated that "it is difficult to say that Kulakov is truly a person of faith, since he

is, after all, a KGB lieutenant general. Kulakov is, first and foremost, a government man, but one who understands perfectly well that it is only religion that can bring moral values back to society. This religion cannot be alien to the people, it must be the one on which the entire culture was built, which the people have been genetically shaped by." From Zaitsev's point of view, it is for this reason that the primacy of the Russian Orthodox Church is recognized in the oblast. At the same time, however, the local authorities were convinced that "Orthodox churches must be built with money from parishioners and sponsors, not the budget" (vol. 1, pg. 497). Another example of the authorities' position on supporting the Russian Orthodox Church is a quotation that the authors attribute to Valeri Zubov, the governor of Krasnoyarsk Krai. According to the book: "Zubov had no goodwill toward the diocese, holding that it 'is always demanding something from the authorities, but it doesn't give society anything.' In private conversations, Zubov expressed a strong preference for Protestantism and Catholicism, which 'do a lot for other charities and hardly demand anything'" (vol. 2, pg. 478).

The Church, in its turn, pursued the independence and self-sufficiency it needed to guide

society to the right path and save people's souls. The Russian Orthodox Church is compelled to participate in an exchange of resources and legitimization with governmental structures on both the federal and the regional level; the clergy, however, fear that this unsustainable Symphony model for state-confessional relations will transform into a Cesaro-papist one, and not without reason. Events played out in precisely that way in Kostroma Oblast under Igor Slyunyayev, where the governor "actively interfered with the life of the diocese, came to diocesan meetings, and entered into conflict with Archbishop Alexander" (vol. 2, pg. 412) and "finagled" the appointment of a new hierarch, and in Krasnodar Krai under Alexander Tkachov, where "cooperation with the Kuban Metropolitanate of the Russian Orthodox Church is taking place in the most diverse of spheres, civil servants themselves strive to involve representatives of the priesthood in many projects, encouraging the Church to pursue active public service. . . . In some cases, that cooperation exceeds the bounds of what one can properly call 'aid,' and it must be said that the government is managing the Church. For example, at the direct insistence of the administration, priests are sent to kindergartens and compelled to participate in

various public events" (vol. 2, pg. 439).

The axiological divergence between the two sides centers around the fact that the secular authorities function as a pragmatic, conservative force, while the clergy position themselves as ideological traditionalists. The authorities' conservative position is based on their efforts to preserve the established order and balance of forces in society in an unchanged state for as long as possible and to protect the interests of the groups who are entrenched in power, and they are only prepared to embrace innovation in extreme situations, when failure to reform may soon lead to the death of the established system. In short, the authorities are inclined to stick as closely as possible to the words of Edmund Burke, the founding father of conservatism, who declared that "I should be led to my remedy by a great grievance."² As it was put in a fictional film about the Russian government: "He [the governor] didn't do anything good, of course . . . but he didn't do anything bad either. . . . And that almost never happens, by the way."

At the same time, it does not matter to the authorities what

2. Edmund Burke, 1898, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 293.

methods are used to preserve the status quo and save the political body from the death of reform: cultural liberalization, democratic procedures, permitting abortion, juvenile justice, utilizing aid from non-Orthodox sources, etc. The moral content and religious sanction of the methods to be used do not matter to the authorities. This cannot be said of the hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church, for whom morality and compliance with theological norms are crucial criteria for making political decisions.

For the traditionalist hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church, the established order and balance of forces in society are unacceptable. They strive to change it and unbalance it in favor of Church structures. From the clergy's point of view many of the methods used by the secular authorities are intolerable and further the moral decay of society; the authorities are accused of insincerity, dishonesty, a lack of piety, and of adhering to their own personal interpretations of religious doctrine. Thus, the hierarchs of Voronezh diocese complained about the local authorities to the researchers, reporting that "the administration attracts civil servants who call themselves responsible people, when they are nothing of the kind. We present initiatives, but the

administration ignores us, takes our ideas and conducts social campaigns independently of the diocese" (vol. 1, pg. 496). In his turn, the head of the missionary department of Ekaterinodar and Kuban dioceses, Archpriest Aleksey Kasatikov, in describing the phenomenon of "Cossack Orthodoxy," which was actively promoted by the Krasnodar authorities, noted that "it is not possible to separate out a special Cossack Orthodoxy, since the Cossacks are not a separate ethnic group, like the Viaticchi or Krivichi, and furthermore, 'they fear God so much that they don't go to church'" (vol. 2, pg. 433).

As such, there are many disagreements between the secular authorities and the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church, not only on the federal level, but also on the regional level. The interactions between secular and religious authorities are also complicated by the fact that numerous internal conflicts exist within both hierarchies, which are both systemic and personal in nature. It is noteworthy that the patriarchate's bet on lobbying for the interests of the Russian Orthodox Church on the local level through practicing Orthodox governors does not always produce the expected results — far from it. It is not unknown for non-religious or only nominally religious governors to be more

loyal to the Russian Orthodox Church than devout heads of Russian federal subjects are.

One cannot overlook the fact the representatives of the secular and religious authorities often resort to uniting their efforts and creating coalitions. Once they have formed alliances, the secular and Church leaders of a Russian region undertake quite bold attempts to lobby for their consolidated interests, including reaching out to higher authorities in both the secular and religious hierarchies. Thus, in many cases, governors have lobbied for the interests of the diocesan elites in the Synod (the Republic of Adygea, Lipetsk Oblast, the Republic of Buryatia). Specifically, “in July of 2009, President Nagovitzin of Buryatia approached Patriarch Kirill with a request to create an Orthodox diocese in the Republic, which was, to a large degree, the result of lobbying by the Orthodox priesthood of Buryatia” (vol. 1, pg. 337). In other cases, the secular authorities (the governor or mayor) obtained public support from church hierarchs when promoting their candidacies in upcoming elections and combined their efforts to actively (and, for a certain period, successfully) oppose the decisions of the federal center, explicitly speaking out against reelecting the old bureaucrats (the Nenets Autonomous

Okrug under Aleksey Barinov, Bryansk Oblast under Yuri Lodkin, Volgograd under Yevgeny Ishchenko). At the same time, the clerics continued to support their partners, even after the ex-leaders experienced political reprisals (opening criminal proceedings in which the courts render guilty verdicts). There were also cases in which religious and secular leaders organized joint economic and “sponsorship” projects, such as appropriating funds from drunk drivers apprehended by employees of the State Automobile Inspectorate to finance the construction of a church (Volgograd Oblast).

At the same time, the participants in the project themselves note that in comparison with what was recorded a decade ago, the status of state-confessional dialogue and the regulation of religious and social life in the Russian regions is improving. As Sergei Filatov, the editor of the work under consideration, stressed at the presentation of the second volume of *Religious and Social Life in the Russian Regions*: “a slow process of recovery is underway. Religious life is improving, and that has nothing to do with politics. There is less and less barbarism, people are reading more and learning about other [religions]. The Church is gradually changing for the better.”

Comments

In addition to the obvious merits of the first books published through the Religious and Social Life in the Russian Regions Project, it is necessary to point out several debatable issues. The lack of sections explaining the procedure for finding respondents and the method for selecting secondary sources of information raises questions.

The participants in this project have good and longstanding reputations in the academic sphere for their extensive research work and they are widely recognized as respected authorities in the field, but this fact does not obviate the need to describe the methodological element of their research. Reading the books makes it clear that in assembling the articles, they used interviews conducted by the authors with representatives of government agencies of federal subjects, managers of religious organizations and communities, and members of the expert community, as well as materials from the print and online press. These books, however, do not disclose the methods used to find and select respondents. How was the list of people to interview generated? What problems arose while compiling the list? How did the researchers approach the various government

officials? What problems arose in the course of interacting with representatives of the authorities? Did all of them agree to those conversations? What was the percentage of refusals? In which regions were they unable to interact with representatives of the authorities? Was it mostly the relatively “liberal” bureaucrats who made contact, or was it possible to prevent the sample from being skewed? Analogous questions also arise in relation to the interviews conducted with experts and representatives of the clergy.

The questions regarding the methods for selecting secondary sources of information and the associated citations are equally relevant. How were sources identified as credible? How was it established that one resource had priority over another? What kind of resources were used during the search for information? The books under consideration here do not always include citations, and the second volume contains the formulation “as some Internet resources indicate” with no reference to specific sources. Furthermore, there are not always bibliographical lists at the end of chapters, although the discussion of religious and social tendencies in each article is preceded by a historical outline of the development of religion in the relevant region.

Any discussion of the shortcomings of these books must include the relatively low level of clarity provided by the sections on neopagan communities. Thus, the article on Slavic neopaganism (Rodnovery) in Kaluga Oblast consists of references to a 1999 event and reminiscences about the work of 2005. This is despite the fact that Kaluga Oblast might be called one of the centers of Russian native faith. It is precisely in Kaluga that the annual Panslavic Veche is held, where the head of one of the most significant neopagan organizations in Russia, the Union of Slavic Native Faith Communities (USNFC), is elected. The book does not explain that several important changes took place in the Kaluga native faith community during the period under discussion. The head of the USNFC was changed in 2011. In 2014, the USNFC was registered as an interregional public organization to support and develop Slavic culture. In 2015, a major ceremonial structure, the Temple of the Fire of Svarog, was built on land owned by the USNFC in Kaluga Oblast. Furthermore, in discussing Kemerovo Oblast, the writers confined themselves to merely noting the presence of communities composed of followers of neopagan movements like “Radosteya,” “Anastasia (The Sounding Cedars of Russia),” and “The City of the Sun” without

providing any information about unique aspects of their presence in that region. For the sake of fairness, it is necessary to mention that information on these communities is presented in descriptions of other regions, specifically Kirov Oblast and Krasnoyarsk Krai; however, there is no thesis statement regarding the similarity between the status of these communities in different regions to be found in the text.

Conclusion

Despite several criticisms, the first volumes of the informational and analytical project entitled *Religious and Social Life in the Russian Regions* are examples of quality work that is colossal in volume and fundamental in scope (plans call for seven volumes to be published), performed by a group of writers who are devoted to their work. Their efforts deserve attention from various types of specialists and will occupy a place of honor not only on the bookshelves of specialists in state-confessional questions, religious scholars, sociologists and political scientists, but also everyday citizens who take an interest in the religious, societal, and political situation in the Russian regions.

M. Bogachev (Translated by Isaac Stackhouse Wheeler)