
Review

Reviewed Work(s): Nihil Obstat: Religion, Politics, and Social Change in East-Central Europe and Russia by Sabrina P. Ramet

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Newman relies on the behaviour of the secretary-general in interstate crises to determine the role and effectiveness of the person holding the office. On the one hand, times of crises are those in which the interplay of member interests, contextual constraints, and leadership attributes are most evident. Yet the actions of the secretary-general are more than the sum of his crisis management skills, and there is a tendency to miss efforts at UN reform and informal negotiation, which influence effectiveness in crises and determine the support the leader has among member states. Still, the book is an excellent source for what UN leaders have done in response to the major challenges to international peace and security over the last fifteen years.

Newman identifies two trends in the 1990s that will shape the office of the UN secretary-general. First, and counter-intuitively, the secretary-general's scope for independent action is being narrowed by greater consensus within the security council. There may be little discretion available to the UN leader when the member states are clear on what problems to address and how to address them. This may suggest a diminishment of the office, yet the second trend paradoxically suggests otherwise. Newman argues that the stature of the secretary-general has been raised with the extension of UN activities into domestic peace-keeping operations. One walks away from this discussion having a more uncertain, but profitably more complex, view of the secretary-general's potential and likely future influence.

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SABRINA P. RAMET. *Nihil Obstat: Religion, Politics, and Social Change in East-Central Europe and Russia*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1998. Pp. xi, 424. \$23.95 (us), paper.

'NOTHING STANDS IN the way' is the English translation of the title of this book of essays by a renowned specialist in the field of politics and religion, Sabrina P. Ramet. The fourteen essays (six were published earlier and eight written specifically for the book) cover the history and current developments in church-state relations in East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, Albania, Ukraine, and Russia.

Ramet presents a thoughtful re-evaluation of Communist policy towards religion in the former Eastern bloc, and argues that while, as a rule, churches suffered greatly under Communism, some of them in fact benefited from it. In many cases, the 'approved' traditional churches were sheltered by atheistic states from competition on the part of their persecuted rivals. In other cases, minority religions were purposely supported by the Communist states to undermine dominant religions in the area. Ramet links changes and shifts in Communist policy towards religious denominations to changes in the political goals of particular governments as they moved from system building to system decay.

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Ramet's attention to the history of individual churches and refusal to limit her research to contemporary developments or the immediate Communist-era history of the region is one of the book's greatest strengths. Her historical approach to the treatment of the sensitive area of politics and religion allows her to contribute significantly to the understanding of the interrelations between religion and national identity. Ramet discusses the interplay between religion and nationalism not only in the former Yugoslavia (the clearest example of a strong bond between religion and ethnicity), but also in Poland, Hungary, and the former Czechoslovakia, rightly presenting religion as 'a constructive element in the group identity and nationalism of most nationality groups'.

Another strength of the book is its comparative approach to the study of church-state relations in East-Central Europe. Although the essays differ in methodology and substance, together they provide an overview of religious developments in the region over the last century. Even the Cuban experience in the area of church-state relations has been cited to demonstrate similarities and differences in the Communist treatment of religion. The 'encyclopædism' of the book, and Ramet's attempt to include in her analysis as many countries of the region as possible, can also be held responsible for some of the book's shortcomings. The essay on Ukraine can serve as an example of both positive and negative features of Ramet's approach. On the one hand, the essay presents a balanced overview of the complicated religious situation in contemporary Ukraine; on the other, Ramet's attempt to cover yet another East European country founders on the lack of deeper knowledge of that country's history.

Ramet's characterization of western Ukraine as 'overwhelmingly Roman Catholic' contradicts not only the 'hard' facts of past and present, but even the author's own analysis of the religious developments there. There are more errors of this kind in the book. Bohdan Khmelnytsky never 'signed' any agreement with the tsar, as that would have run counter to Muscovite diplomatic practice, and the Kievan metropolitanate never 'looked forward to some assurance of local ecclesiastical autonomy' 'thanks to this agreement'. In fact, the metropolitan of Kiev opposed the 1654 Pereiaslav 'agreement'. In the eighteenth century, the Kievan metropolitanate's jurisdiction was restricted not to the limits of the city of Kiev but to the limits of the Kiev eparchy. During the Second World War, the Nazis who according to Ramet 'did not care one way or the other about Ukrainian religious life', in fact tried to contain the development of nationally oriented denominations.

At the beginning of the book, Ramet explains that she chose the Latin phrase *Nihil obstat* to indicate that there is nothing to stop new religious movements in the former Communist bloc. A reading of Ramet's book makes one conclude that, although the obstacles once erected in the way of new religions by Communist officials are mostly gone, new obstacles created by the traditional churches and the nationalist governments allied with them, still stand in the way of religious freedom in many countries of the region. Ramet's new book illuminates, as probably

no other book in the field, both change and continuity in the religious policies of East-Central Europe during the region's turbulent transition period.

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AVNER COHEN. *Israel and the Bomb*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. Pp. xviii, 470. \$27.50 (us).

EVERYONE SEEMS TO 'know' that Israel possesses nuclear weapons, but almost no one can provide the details of how Israel became an undeclared nuclear power. Now, with the publication of Avner Cohen's carefully researched book, we have a convincing story of the early years of Israel's quest for the bomb.

Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, was the guiding force behind Israel's nuclear program; his close associate at the defence ministry, Shimon Peres, carried the program forward by securing French assistance in the 1950s, resulting in the construction of a reactor at Dimona. Ben-Gurion's successor, Levi Eshkol, oversaw the project to completion of the first nuclear devices in 1967, and his successor, Golda Meir, apparently convinced the uneasy Americans to accept Israel's bomb in the basement.

Some of the most interesting new material in this book involves the US-Israeli discussions about Israel's nuclear program. John F. Kennedy in particular was uneasy about proliferation of nuclear weapons and made a major effort to get the Israelis to stop short of going nuclear; blunt pressure was used to get Ben-Gurion to agree to US inspections of Dimona. The American rationale for the inspections was that Egypt's president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, might initiate a pre-emptive war unless he could be reassured that the Israeli reactor was for peaceful purposes, as Ben-Gurion claimed; from 1964 to 1967, US inspectors visited Dimona annually and found no conclusive evidence that weapons were being produced. This conclusion was passed on to Nasser. We now know that Israel deliberately misled the Americans, concealing the chemical separation plant buried beneath Dimona, and the Americans thereby misled Nasser. So much for the value of inspections.

Cohen also has new information on Lyndon Johnson and the Israeli search for conventional weapons. One of the Israeli rationales, according to Cohen, in pursuing the nuclear option was to pressure the Americans into providing conventional weapons as an alternative to Israel's reliance on nuclear weapons. During the Johnson presidency, this form of implicit blackmail worked remarkably well. Despite pressures from his own bureaucracy to insist that Israel sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty as the quid pro quo for obtaining combat aircraft, Johnson decided against any linkage: Israel could have the planes and build its bombs.

By this time – 1967-8 – Johnson and his advisers surely knew that Israel had developed a weapon and the issue henceforth would be whether or not Israel would be reasonably discreet about this new fact. Israel's stated policy was that it