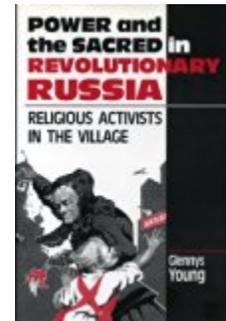


Glennys Young. *Power and the Sacred in Revolutionary Russia: Religious Activists in the Village*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997. xvii + 307 pp. \$47.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-271-01720-4.

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Religion and Resistance in the NEP Village

In her introduction to the January 1999 number of *The Russian Review*, Eve Levin called attention to the recent revival of scholarly interest in the history of religion and religious practice in Russia and the USSR.[1] Popular religiosity has become an important focus not only of Muscovite history, but also of work on urban and rural society in the Late Imperial and Soviet eras.[2] Glennys Young's study of how clergy and laity protected their churches against the Soviet state and anti-religious activists during the 1920s is a contribution to that revival. Young's work also adds to the literature on the Bolshevik transformational project as confronted (and perhaps itself transformed) by Russian society during NEP.[3] Young raises important questions about a topic that has received little scholarly attention—villagers' adherence to traditional norms of Orthodox religious practice in defiance of state anti-religious campaigns. Her study is strongly influenced by models of peasant resistance and moral economy associated with James Scott.[4] Young's research and bold interpretations should open avenues for further studies.

Young argues that clergy and laity became political actors when state and party-endorsed anti-religious campaigns threatened rural Orthodoxy in the 1920s. Religious activists adopted "weapons of the weak," like ignoring state edicts and learning to "speak Soviet." But they also actively resisted by petitioning high-level authorities and using rural soviets, cooperatives, and the village assembly to protect church property and parish autonomy against perceived threats. These threats came from state

agents, Komsomols, and members of the League of Militant Godless, all of whom had at best a feeble presence in the village. A more pervasive danger came from within the village itself, from youth, returning Red Army soldiers, and labor migrants, who identified clergy and religious ritual with the village's paternalistic power structure.

Clergy and laity framed their resistance as the defense of community norms (both in terms of subsistence and morality) against those who would transform and destroy village culture. Anti-religious activists similarly appealed to village moral economy, and argued that priests, churches, and rituals drained community resources. The Soviet state, in any case, had limited means to impose its will. Young concludes that the resilience of religion fed Bolshevik fears of a kulak-infested countryside holding back the drive towards socialism. Only an all out "militarized" campaign could cleanse the village of "counter-revolutionary" religious practice; hence the success of rural religious activists helps us understand the drift towards collectivization.

Young's first two chapters present background and introduce themes that will carry through the manuscript. Chapter One discusses religion's place in village politics between the Great Reforms and the 1917 Revolution. Young explains the demands made upon and the problems confronting rural clergy and (drawing heavily on the work of Gregory Freeze) concludes that the Late Imperial regime's efforts to use the church as an exten-

sion of the state actually made clergy and laity more autonomous.[5] Laity became more involved in parish affairs and used church councils for their own aims. Young argues that the parish became an arena for two political contests: one pitted laity against clergy for control over the parish; the other set peasant households dominating the village assembly against youth and labor migrants. Young gives special attention to labor migrants' rejection of religion and the village hierarchical order, as evidenced in Semen Kanatchikov's memoir.[6] According to Young, such "marginal" elements "were contesting religion's role in providing the underpinnings of village power and, implicitly, the national political order it supported and shaped" (p. 48).

Chapter Two addresses village religious politics during the 1917 Revolution and the Civil War. In keeping with findings of Orlando Figes, Young argues that peasant smallholders dominated autonomous rural institutions and sought to defend them from "outsiders." [7] Peasant smallholders successfully protected "their" churches and "their" priests from the Bolshevik regime and anti-religious activists, including returning Red Army soldiers and labor migrants who saw anticlericalism as a means to challenge the village hierarchy.

Chapters Three and Four address the stunted and thwarted efforts of anti-religious activists, the Communist Party, and the League of Militant Godless to displace Orthodoxy in village culture. In Chapter Three, Young argues that anti-religious activists and Komsomols hampered by limited resources (including a limited time-budget), reverted to a "campaign" mode of fitful assaults on the parish and clergy. For all of their bluster, anti-religious activists had little success, although they did worry parish clergy and laity. Young determines that anti-religious activities if anything escalated pre-existing village conflicts over religion. She provides an interesting interpretation of anti-religious activities like Komsomol Christmas as inversion rituals meant to symbolically legitimize the new Soviet order. Chapter Four describes the limited rural campaigns of voluntary anti-religious associations, including the League of Militant Godless. Growing village conflict over religious belief and practice did not depend upon such programs. Rather, it was a continuation of tensions caused by youth, former soldiers, and labor migrants, who treated religion as a symbolic center of their power struggle with the village hierarchy.

Chapters Five through Eight explain how religious activists defended parish and church. In Chapter Five, Young argues that clergy responded to the Soviet

regime's anti-religious project by seeking greater influence over and participation in key rural institutions. These included the cooperatives, the rural soviets, and the village assembly. Despite state policies designed to limit or prevent clerical participation, priests played politics through a number of strategies, like setting up alternative organizations (e.g., cooperatives), voting and holding office, and even leaving the clergy so as to work for the parish from "inside" Soviet institutions. As Young puts it, "Clergy had become, to an unprecedented degree, political entrepreneurs" (p. 191). In Chapter Six, she demonstrates that laity also used cooperatives, soviets, and the village assembly to defend their parishes. At the same time, laity "democratized" the parish by increasing their control over the church councils. If anything, the regime's 1924-25 campaign to revitalize the soviets accentuated the role of lay activists.

In Chapter Seven Young argues that religious activists competed in several political venues to secure resources for their parishes, and she analyzes ways activists employed political discourses. The real issue in village politics, Young asserts, was who would have cultural power—supporters of the Soviet regime, or the parish activists. In Chapter Eight Young shows that as the Party in 1923-25 increased its pressure on the church, clergy and laity expanded their Soviet political activities. Defense of religious practice and ritual often found support from sympathetic rural Soviet officials. In one of the book's most interesting sections, Young holds that from 1926 priests and lay people used religious ritual as a mode of political activism against "outsiders" whom they accused of threatening the community's moral order by attacking Orthodoxy.

In Chapter Nine, Young focuses on how anti-religious activists and publications depicted church supporters. To Bolshevik opponents of Orthodoxy, religious activists' use of soviets and cooperatives constituted a doomed anti-Soviet conspiracy. They cast the religious as cunning, sinister, kulak-driven, and feminine. The religious were a barrier on the road to socialism to be overcome by a militaristic campaign. As this militaristic rhetoric evolved, the term "*tserkovniki*," used at the dawn of NEP to refer to all clergy, transformed into an ascriptive political category conflated with "kulak."

Young's Conclusion places her findings into the context of debates over the nature of NEP. Was NEP more or less pluralistic, or was it about "creeping totalitarianism"? Young interprets her evidence as supporting neither position. The regime intended complete polit-

ical hegemony under NEP, but was unable to achieve this goal out of its own weakness and because of popular resistance. "By 1928-29," Young insists, "religious activists had presented the regime and its cadres with a stark choice: either give up its agenda for political, economic, and cultural transformation or use militaristic and violent means to achieve that goal" (p. 280).

Young has broken new ground and makes a challenging and important argument. While I am inclined to agree with most of her interpretations, the book might have been made even stronger in several ways.

Readers will notice that the labor migrants who figure so prominently in Chapters One and Two then become cardboard cutouts. They appear regularly in a list of "usual suspects" opposing the church and religious ritual (youth, labor migrants, and returning Red Army soldiers), but with little elaboration. Young has done such a fine job portraying the supporters of rural Orthodoxy that one wishes she had given flesh to its opponents. Perhaps one way of doing so would have been to give greater attention to migration patterns both before and after 1917 (as is, Young's discussion of migration is cursory). This would have proven particularly valuable given Young's use of provincial case studies. Young frequently presents cases drawn from materials on three provinces—Saratov, Smolensk, and Leningrad. There are solid sources on rural society, and especially on migration, in Saratov and Smolensk for the entire period covered by Young. But she does not provide a sense of what distinguished rural society in these provinces, nor does she use materials on migration or rural life to support her assertions regarding village tensions. Doing so would have bolstered her argument in most cases (although in a few of the cases used from Smolensk, at least, details on specific villages would have rendered her assertions problematic).

It is unfortunate that Young's book appeared before publication of Jeffrey Burds' monograph on labor migration and village culture.[8] Young's discussion of the dynamics of village politics would have benefited by considering the importance of reputation and reciprocity. Burds explains the importance of reciprocity to practices like "*pomoch*" (mutual aid), an important point relevant to Young's discussion of laity's relationship with the clergy. Young argues that labor migrants opposed religious ritual and the parish hierarchy. But labor migrants often struggled to maintain their reputations as reliable and trustworthy providers, argues Burds, and the problem of reputation might explain the frequency with which migrants were accused of religious apostasy. This

observation has important implications for Young's analysis. Moreover, Burds (and several recent scholars) argues that Orthodoxy was of continued significance to many labor migrants who (unlike Kanatchikov) did not abandon their fathers' faith.

The analysis as a whole, I think, would have been more forcefully drawn had Young discussed the sometimes problematic nature of her sources. For all of the impressive textual analysis represented by this book, at times Young treats her sources as transparent. The richest material presented in *Power and the Sacred* comes from newspapers, and especially from anti-religious papers and the provincial Soviet press. Young provides example after example of rural correspondents' reports on soviets infiltrated by priests, cooperatives dominated by laity who use them to support the parish church, etc.

While Young's last chapter discusses the representation of the religious in Soviet anti-religious literature in terms of its function in the Bolshevik transformational project, she does not ask how exposes of rural religion might have functioned as an aspect of rural politics. Should we assume that every soviet chairman accused of drinking with a priest actually did? Might it be possible to read some complaints of clerical influence as a "call and response" between central authorities who wanted to root out pernicious religious elements and correspondents eager to please? Might we read such reports as a form of denunciation that was itself a mode of rural politics (as was denouncing *otkhodniki* as heretics or atheists before 1917 according to Burds)? Addressing such questions regarding sources more explicitly (she does occasionally do so in notes) would only have increased the value of Young's fine monograph.

Finally, this is a handsome book, but Young should have been served better by her editors. Errors that should have been caught before publication add up and become distracting. Places identified as in Smolensk province in one chapter, for instance, turn up in Saratov (where they belong) in later chapters. The text is often repetitive, as are the notes (in some cases, entire footnote comments reappear in subsequent notes). And there are multiple copy-editing errors in the notes and bibliography.

But such criticisms should not diminish the importance of *Power and the Sacred*. Scholars of popular religiosity, Soviet rural policy, village social relations and politics, and the roots of collectivization will all have to consider the implications of Glennys Young's work. Young's book has raised such important issues that one hopes it stimulates more research.[9]

Notes:

[1]. Eve Levin, "Religious Revival: The History of Religion in the Post-Cold War Era," *Russian Review* 58, no. 1 (January 1999): vi-vii.

[2]. See, for example, Jeffrey Burds, *Peasant Dreams and Market Politics: Labor Migration and the Russian Village, 1861-1905* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998), esp. Chapter Seven; Chris Chulos, "Peasant Religion in Post-Emancipation Russia: Voronezh Province, 1880-1917" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1994); Gregory Freeze, "Counter-Reformation in Russian Orthodoxy: Popular Response to Religious Innovation, 1922-25," *Slavic Review* 54, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 305-39; Kimberly Page Herlinger, "Class, Piety, and Politics: Workers, Orthodoxy, and the Problem of Religious Identity in Russia, 1881-1914" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1996); Daniel Paris, "Commissars in Red Cassocks: Former Priests in the League of Militant Godless," *Slavic Review* 54, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 340-64; David Pretty, "The Saints of Revolution: Political Activists in Ivanovo-Voznesensk and the Path of Most Resistance," *Slavic Review* 54, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 276-304; Edward Roslof, "The Renovationist Movement in the Russian Orthodox Church, 1922-1946" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1994); Mark David Steinberg, "Workers on the Cross: Religious Imagination in the Writing of Russian Workers, 1910-1924," *Russian Review* 53, no. 2 (April 1994): 213-39; Isabel Tirado, "The Revolution, Young Peasants, and the Komsol's Anti-Religious campaigns (1920-1928)," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 26, no. 1-3 (1992): 97-117; and Reginald Zelnik, "'To the Unaccustomed Eye': Religion and Irreligion in the Experience of St. Petersburg Workers in the 1870s," *Russian History* 16, no. 2-4 (1989): 297-326.

[3]. See, for example, Helmut Altrichter, *Die Bauern von Tver: Vom Leben auf dem russischen Dirfe zwischen Revolution und Kollektivierung* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1984); Alan Ball, *Russia's Last Capitalists: The Nephews, 1921-1929* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); William Chase, *Workers, Society, and the Soviet State: Labor and Life in Moscow, 1918-1929* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch, and Richard Stites, eds., *Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Michael David-Fox, *Revolution of the Mind: Higher Learning Among the Bolsheviks, 1918-1929* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997); Wendy Goldman, *Women, The*

State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Lewis Siegelbaum, *Soviet State and Society Between the Revolutions, 1918-1929* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Mark von Hagen, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship: The Red Army and the Soviet Socialist State, 1917-1930* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990); Elizabeth Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

[4]. Young's text is peppered with references to James C. Scott's major works, including *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Subsistence and Rebellion in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); and *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). At points, Young also cites as a model Samuel Popkin's *The Rational Peasant* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), without resolving the conflicts between the two models.

[5]. See in particular Gregory Freeze, *The Parish Clergy in Nineteenth Century Russia: Crisis, reform, Counter-Reform* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983).

[6]. Reginald Zelnik, trans. and ed., *A Radical Worker in Tsarist Russia: The Autobiography of Semen Ivanovich Kanatchikov* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986).

[7]. See Orlando Figes, "Peasant Farmers and the Minority Groups of Rural Society: Peasant Egalitarianism and Village Social relations During the Russian Revolution (1917-1921)," in *Peasant Economy, Culture, and Politics of European Russia, 1800-1921*, ed. by Esther Kingston-Mann and Timothy Mixter (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 378-401; *Peasant Russia, Civil War: the Volga Countryside in Revolution, 1917-1921* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); and "The Russian Peasant Community in the Agrarian revolution, 1917-1918,," in *Land Commune and Peasant Community in Russia: Communal Forms in Imperial and Early Soviet Society*, ed. by Roger Bartlett (London: MacMillan, 1990), 237-53.

[8]. Burds, *Peasant Dreams and Market Politics*.

[9]. Young's work, for instance, calls out for further local studies. To give just one example, Young's case studies on Smolensk are drawn from the national press and the captured Smolensk Archive, but a far greater

wealth of material on rural party and soviet institutions and the struggle over religion are now accessible to researchers in Smolensk's local archives. See the published guides to Smolensk's state and former party archives, *Katalog arkhivnykh fondov gosarkhiva Smolenskoi oblasti i ego filiali v g. Viaz'me (sovetskii period)* (Smolensk, 1987), and *Tsentr Dokumentatsii Noveishei istorii Smolenskoi oblasti. Kratkii spravochnik po fondov* (Smolensk,

1998). For the best discussion of the problematic nature of materials in the captured Smolensk Archive, see Evgenii Kodin, "*Smolenskii Arkhiv*" i *Amerikanskaia sovetologiiia* (Smolensk: SGPU, 1998), Chapter One.

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