

## **BOOK REVIEWS**

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**Joachim G. Persoon, *Spirituality, Power and Revolution: Contemporary Monasticism in Communist Ethiopia* /  
Vaclav Jezek, *Overview of the Orthodox Church During Communism*,  
Volos Academy of Theological Studies, Volos, 2014, 545 p.**

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In a special way, the Volos Theological Academy from Greece published in 2014 a book written by two authors about the relationships between the Orthodox Church and Communism. The first part of it (p. 11-259), signed by the English researcher Joachim G. Persoon, specialised in the history of the Ethiopian Church (he gained his PhD at the School of Oriental and African Studies from the University of London), is in fact the PhD thesis of the first author.

Divided in six chapters, the book comprises a series of introductory elements (pp. 11-50) like the literature used by the author in the process of documentation (pp. 15-17), theoretical concepts (pp. 22-29), aesthetical aspects (pp. 30-39), and terminology (p. 39), a big exploration of the history of the monastic life from the area (pp. 51-117) and the most important aspects that defined this life during Darg's Communist period.

The author presents the main geographic aspects and shows how they influenced the development of the monastic life

in the zone, talks about the importance of the sacred dance for the Ethiopian religion and culture and about the importance of the rules in Ethiopian monasticism<sup>1</sup> and about the importance of the abbeys in the process of evangelism<sup>2</sup>, and presents some examples of important monasteries, chosen from the almost 1000 (p. 14) existing on that territory. Then, in the second part of the presentation, he presents the evolution of monasticism in the Communist period, showing that

“During the Communist period, monasticism manifested itself as the sacred appearing at the heart of usurping secularism, which it sought to transfigure through compassion and renovating energy. The monastic community's experience was marked both by negotiation, ambiguity, indetermination and surprisingness” (p. 19).

Fruit of the academic work of the author, but also of the direct interaction with the monks and the Ethiopian environment (because the author lived two and a half years in Ethiopia for documentation and he interviewed a lot of monks), this research offers to the reader a beautiful and complex image of that world and of its

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<sup>1</sup> He shows that, almost each monastery has its own rule, but not like in the Catholic space: “Each Ethiopian Monastery has a *danb*, although it has less central importance than a western rule. Kings and wealthy patrons sponsored the writings of rules”. Joachim G. Persoon, *Spirituality, power and revolution: contemporary monasticism in communist Ethiopia* / Vaclav Jezek, *Overview of the Orthodox Church during Communism* (Volos: Volos Academy of Theological Studies, 2014), 61.

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<sup>2</sup> “In order for the monasteries to remain relevant in Ethiopian society, it was essential that they be active in evangelism.” Persoon, *Spirituality, power and revolution* / Jezek, *Overview of the Orthodox Church during Communism*, 119.

interaction with Communism, which did not affect the monastic life in the same manner it did in the European Orthodox space.

The second part of the volume (pp. 260-495), written by the Czech priest Vaclav Jezek, aims to help the reader to become familiar with the situation of the Orthodox Churches from Eastern Europe. After an examination of the history of the Church in this space (starting from the Middle Ages), the author presents the main aspects of the relations between Church and State in countries like Romania (p. 437-442), Yugoslavia (pp. 442-447), Bulgaria (pp. 447-452), Albania (p. 452-455) or Cyprus (p. 455-460). At the end of the book, there is another presentation of a brief history of the Ethiopian Church (pp. 460-464) and the impressions of the first author about the country.

Except the fact that the work offers much information in a very unsystematic way, the book is important and interesting. It is interesting for the readers who want to delve into such an unknown part of the

Church history and it is important for the historical research, because it brings new information and fills an empty space in the contemporary research about this subject.

Therefore, the readers interested in the exotic aspects of the Church history, but also the historians who are interested in finding new and important information about this subject and about the History of the Orthodox Churches from the European spaces, during the Communist period<sup>3</sup>, are invited to read it and to use it in their new researches as an important source.

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<sup>3</sup> As it is also presented in Christine Chaillot (ed.), *Biserica Ortodoxă din Europa de Est în secolul XX*, translated into Romanian by Liliana Donose Samuelsson (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2011).