

Between Heaven and Russia: Religious Conversion and Political Apostasy in Appalachia. By Sarah Riccardi-Swartz. New York: Fordham University Press, 2022. xvi, 283 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Glossary. Index. Illustrations. \$29.95, paper.
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In this book Sarah Riccardi-Swartz explores a small community of Orthodox Christians in West Virginia. She provides the expected details on liturgy, traditions, and community service as well as unexpected accounts of vocal Vladimir Putin supporters in the rural US. The parishioners of “St. John’s” Orthodox Church and monks of “St. Basil’s” monastery (names changed to provide anonymity) are members of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR), and the majority are converts to Orthodoxy rather than “cradle” members of this Christian confession. *Between Heaven and Russia* depends on over forty extensive interviews conducted during twelve months of on-site field research. The author describes her research process and professional standards in detail and provides insightful commentary from secondary literature on history, religious studies, political science, and Appalachian studies.

One theme that emerges is that many of these parishioners and monks turned to the Orthodox faith after journeys that led them from evangelical Protestant Christianity to ROCOR after times of disillusionment, questioning, and experimentation. Several earned advanced degrees in theology, history, or other disciplines; and many developed a love of Orthodox aesthetics. They became convinced that Orthodoxy was the most authentic expression of the Christian faith, and that ROCOR was the one US jurisdiction that had escaped the “modernism” and “liberalism” of the Orthodox Church in America and other bodies (such as Greek and Antiochian). Members frequently mentioned the influences and writings of St. John Maximovitch and Fr. Seraphim Rose. The author summarizes, “Russian Orthodoxy offered converts a stalwart type of Christianity—one that could undergo the trials of both Russian socialism and American secularism, emerging on the other side as a bastion of religious purity, traditional piety, and conservative morality” (110).

A second theme which stands out is that many in this West Virginia community believe that the US system of representative government is not able to withstand multiple cultural changes to which they object, such as shifting views on gender. Several mentioned past involvement with the Republican Party or other conservative political organizations. However, they decided that the monarchism of Russian Emperor Nicholas II and the leadership of President Vladimir Putin were among the best models for opposing unwelcome cultural developments. They noted the benefit of Putin’s close relationship with Patriarch Kirill of Moscow. For these converts, “. . . Russia seemed to be their only hope for social salvation, for reclaiming America for God, and for preserving the status quo of Christian hegemony in an increasingly diversifying western world. Anxious over America’s path toward progressive secularism and its attached social moral politics, converts looked beyond the borders of [the] United States and beyond the confines of democracy to a salvific home abroad” (3). Riccardi-Swartz notes the strong influence of less-than-reliable online news reports and analysis. (This book was published in early 2022 and does not address reactions to the expansion of the brutal and unjust war in Ukraine, championed by Putin.)

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The author concludes by describing what she encountered in West Virginia as “Reactive Orthodoxy”: a “form of the faith that finds its roots in an imagined nostalgia for ancient Rus’, American Christian nationalism, and an apocalyptic disenchantment with democracy” (173). The author’s tone is scholarly, yet her personal concern about the opinions she encountered is evident. She demonstrates empathy for some views and choices of community members, but points out apparent inconsistencies, such as Vladimir Putin’s disturbing record on human rights and political freedom, and the limited direct experience of these ultra-conservative converts with contemporary Russia: “The idealization of Russia as an enchanted land filled with Orthodox Christians and churches was often part of the rhetoric used by converts to denote the difference between Russia and the United States” (169). Readers will appreciate the author’s engaging style of writing and her definition of technical terms. This book addresses a range of significant and debated topics, and of course all readers may not agree with every conclusion. Advanced undergraduates would benefit from reading this work for courses, and instructors should expect active discussions. Sarah Riccardi-Swartz should be thanked for her methodical research and compelling presentation: this outstanding and timely book helps to expand our understanding of the experiences and influences of these convert believers and the varieties of Orthodox Christianity in the US.

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In the Suburbs of History: Modernist Visions of the Urban Periphery. By Steven Logan. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021. xiv, 225 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Maps. \$95.00, hard bound; \$38.95, paper. doi: 10.1017/slr.2023.113

Suburbs of History: Modernist Visions of the Urban Periphery by Steven Logan is part of the *Global Suburbanisms* series, edited by Roger Keil of York University, whose aim is to “systematically take stock of worldwide developments in suburbanization and suburbanisms today” (ii). Logan’s is the eighth book in this edition since 2015 and the first authored book grounded, in a broad sense, on long-term research in the field of Communication and Culture and Urban Study. The layered nature of the study is strongly based in a profound understanding of the origin and characteristics of the artistic, architectural, and urban culture of western civilization’s modernism. More narrowly, this synthetic work presents a comprehensive comparative examination of the production of suburban space within capitalist and socialist systems in the post-war period. Logan pays particular attention to the meaning of suburban space, its emergence, urban models, actors in the planning process, as well as the characteristics of the physical expression of suburban space on the opposite sides of typological differences. The emergence and development of suburban space in the socialist/post-socialist and capitalist political, economic, and technological environments is told through case studies of the suburbs of Prague, Jižní Město (South City), and the North York suburb of Toronto, Willowdale. Logan brings out the most important actors and their ideas already in the first pages of the book, establishing the conceptual relations between suburbs in Czechoslovakia (Czech Republic today) and Canada through two 1967 events: the great conference dedicated to “metropolitan problems,” held in North York, Toronto, and the International and Universal Exposition, held in Montreal. Furthermore, the book develops a dialogue between concepts and authors, as well as various historical trends, gradually revealing the main goal: to find common ground