

For God and Country? Religious Student-Soldiers in the Israeli Defence Forces by Elisheva

Rosman-Stollman. University of Texas at Austin: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2014. Pp.xiii + 306, index. £37 (hardback). ISBN 978-0-292-75851-3.

While Elisheva Rosman-Stollman's study of the experiences of religious soldiers focuses in the main on Orthodox Jews (or Religious Zionism) in the Israeli armed forces, it also provides comparative examinations of other armed forces such as those of the US, India, Turkey and Iran, even if these other case studies are covered rather briefly. In all of these examples, the book under review stresses the tension between the military, the state, and religion – between some soldiers' religious loyalties and the total demand of the military for citizen soldiers' unquestioning obedience. The loyalty of religious Israeli soldiers during the 2005 disengagement from Gaza when Jewish settlers had to be removed obviously piqued Rosman-Stollman's interest: why was there not more dissent from Orthodox Jewish soldiers? Her thesis is that Jewish religious pre-service and service programmes designed to help religious soldiers – schemes such as Hesder Yeshivot, Shiluv, Mekhinot and Gar'inim – worked as 'mediating' institutions in Israel against the 'greedy' institution of the military, creating a relatively functional military, and one tempered by civil society, creating on the way a symbiotic relationship between the two. Put simply, religious soldiers now had the space to make their religious observance within the tight confines of military discipline. Religion is also a greedy institution, especially those religions that emphasise orthopraxy (conduct as opposed to faith) such as Judaism and Islam, and such religions will compete with the military over daily ritual. Rosman-Stollman's book examines the four special programmes within Israel in discrete chapters, each programme fulfilling the same purpose of transitioning Orthodox Jews through military service, much of the evidence coming from

interviews that she conducted in Israel, ones that form a useful foundation for the study. The Gar'inim programme that facilitates Orthodox Jewish women to serve in the military is especially interesting.

The state has dealt with the boundaries between the military and civil spheres and with the issue of religion in the military in different ways, the methods employed reflecting national histories and cultures, and civil-military relations more generally. A key factor here is whether soldiers are volunteers or conscripts, the latter being treated differently as (p. 237) 'the military system comprehends that it is uprooting its members from their natural environment and must therefore supply all their needs, including their religious needs.' The mediation discussed in this volume has facilitated the military's attempts to supply religious needs to young conscripts, at least in Israel. Iran is a striking contrast, one where the military is totally subservient to the ruling theocracy; in Turkey, the military genuflects to certain religious custom but still insists on disregarding religion for the needs of training and service, dismissing men and officers suspected of Islamist tendencies; in India soldiers can be billeted together based on religion to help smooth the passage of soldiers through the army, Sikhs and Muslims, for instance, serving with their co-religionists and so able to grow facial hair or eat certain foods. Indian regiments have even matched battle cries to regimental tradition based on religion. There are no mediating structures in, say, Turkey as the military is too suspicious of religious structures. In the US with its strict division of church and state, the chaplaincy mediates religion in the military, there as an ecumenical whole to minister to all Servicepeople. It would have been interesting to hear more on the role of evangelical Christianity in the US military, suggestive of more extreme, non-secular

views by some US military personnel (especially in the air force), a matter touched on by Rosman-Stollman.

The book under review works best as a study of religious soldiers in Israel – where it has new points to make – the more general comparative political analysis of religion and armies is interesting but less original. Rosman-Stollman is to be commended for her book that will provoke more discussion surrounding religious-military competition for the minds of young orthodox soldiers and how some armies – especially Israel – can create soldiers willing to serve two masters simultaneously.

Matthew Hughes