

Recommended reading

Alexander Schmemmann: *The World as Sacrament*, Darton, Longman & Todd 1966 repr. 1974 (= *For the Life of the World*, St Vladimir's Press, 1973 repr. 1977) and *The Eucharist*, St Vladimir's Press, 1988.

Protopresbyter Columba Graham Flegg is a Greek Orthodox priest, based in Edinburgh.

Footnotes

1 Censing refers to the wafting of incense in a censer at people or objects, setting them apart for holy purposes (Ed.).

2 A catechumen is a person who is receiving instruction in preparation for baptism. (Ed.).

3 Nowadays, catechumens and other non-communicants do not usually depart but remain throughout the Liturgy (Ed.).

4 Orthodox do not accept the Roman theory of transubstantiation. The expression 'unbloody sacrifice' affirms that the Eucharist, though a sacrifice, does not involve the shedding of blood anew, because it is seen as a making present, rather than a repetition, of Christ's self offering (Ed.).

5 This term refers here to the communion elements though the sacraments are known as 'mysteries'; beyond the outward and visible sign is the inward spiritual grace (Ed.).

6 The 'altar' is the whole area behind the screen, including the holy table (Ed.).

7 I.e. without the *filioque* clause, and affirming Christ's incarnation 'from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary' (Ed.).

Books on Eastern Orthodoxy: a review article

TIM GRASS AND NICK NEEDHAM (paragraphs marked *)

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So, you have worked your way through this issue of *Evangel* and you would like to take your interest further, perhaps because you are in contact with Orthodox in your locality, or because you wish to find out more about the Orthodox Tradition of theology and worship. Where do you look, and what for? It is possible to visit a number of Christian bookshops and come away without realizing the sheer volume of material relating to Orthodoxy which is now being published. As yet, much of it is available only through Orthodox booksellers, but it ought to be possible to order most of the titles below through a local Christian bookshop. It should be noted that to some extent these represent a personal choice, books which one or other of us has found stimulating to read — but very often, with a subject that is unfamiliar, all of us ask others what they have found worth reading!

For anyone new to this area, you could do worse than get hold of a copy of *Christian History* magazine: no.54 (1997), on Eastern Orthodoxy¹, will furnish you with a basic guide to Orthodox history, theology and spirituality, and has the added benefit of plenty of colour reproductions of Orthodox icons and wall paintings to help you catch something of the aesthetic side of Orthodoxy.

Probably the classic introduction to Orthodoxy for Westerners is Kallistos (formerly Timothy) Ware's work, *Orthodoxy*². First published in 1963, it provides a particularly readable introduction to the history of the Orthodox churches (in the latest edition taking the story on to include the collapse of Communism), as well as an accessible introduction to Orthodox belief and worship, accompanied by a valuable list of suggestions for further reading. This is a book to turn to if college lectures on the history and theology of the Ecumenical Councils left you confused!

Another work by the same author is *The Orthodox Way*³, a widely recommended introduction to Orthodox spirituality. It is well-written, full of memorable phrases, and handles patristic theology in a manner which evokes worship and cries out to be preached, notably in the chapter on 'God as Man', where Ware deftly summarizes the teaching of the Ecumenical Councils on the person of Christ, as well as explaining the significance of the Virgin Birth. He brings out very clearly the way in which Orthodox spirituality focuses on the idea of *theosis* or 'divinization' (drawn from 2 Peter 1:4), being at pains to distinguish this sharply from the sort of pantheism currently fashionable in much New Age thought:

God remains totally other, known to us through his *energies* but remaining forever beyond our comprehension in his *essence* (a popular Orthodox distinction). In his words, 'The essence signifies the whole God as he is in himself, the energies signify the whole God as he is in action.'⁴ It could be said that the book demonstrates the gaps as well as the strengths in much Orthodox theology: the treatment of the Atonement, for example, is unlikely to commend itself to many Evangelicals by its apparent denial of any substitutionary aspect. Evangelicals reading this book may feel that they are breathing an unfamiliar air, at times more reminiscent of Greek philosophy than New Testament spirituality, but in fairness I suspect that an outsider looking at Evangelical spirituality might wish to make similar criticisms about the philosophical influences operating on us!

*Seraphim Rose's *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*⁵ is the Orthodox book I have seen most often on Evangelical bookshelves. Rose (1934–82) was an American convert to Orthodoxy from a mixed Protestant background. A long and intense spiritual pilgrimage led to his embracing Orthodoxy in 1962, in the form of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, the anti-Communist wing of Russian Orthodoxy. Rose spent most of his Orthodox life as a monk in the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, which he was instrumental in founding. Rose's books reflect the biblical and patristic theological conservatism of his communion. He endeared himself to traditional-minded Evangelicals by his detailed critiques of New Ageism, the Charismatic movement, ecumenism and Roman Catholicism, and by his staunch belief in a literal six-day creation. Rose's examination of the whole UFO phenomenon is the best I have seen. Any Evangelical who wants to sample spiritually-minded conservative Orthodoxy at its most scintillating should read this book.

*Although it requires a willingness to engage in some deep and sustained thinking, Vladimir Lossky's *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*⁶ is the best introduction to Orthodox theology in English. Lossky (1903–58) was a Russian lay theologian who was expelled from Russia in 1922 by the Communist regime, spending the rest of his life in France. This work initiates the reader into the Orthodox concepts of the Trinity, creation, incarnation, and the work of the Spirit. It is especially good on the distinctive Eastern view of the single procession of the Spirit from the Father, and the 'uncreated energies' of the Godhead.

At the heart of Orthodoxy lies its worship, and it is well worth examining the Orthodox Liturgy. There are various translations available in English, and a modern-language version was produced by a committee for the Greek Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain in 1995.⁷ This has the Greek and English text on facing pages, and contains the full text of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, which is the one used on most

Sundays of the church's year, as well as a range of other forms of prayer; the overall linguistic feel of the translation is reminiscent of the NIV. It has not received universal approval, however: some Orthodox have made the point that the removal of 'Thou' and 'Thee' and the consequent use of 'You' for both singular and plural means that the significance of some Trinitarian statements in the Creed and the prayers is obscured. A more traditional translation, well-regarded although translated by a non-Orthodox, is Hapgood's *The Service Book of the Orthodox Church*⁸, but I have not seen a copy of this for myself. Other translations may also be purchased cheaply; some are better than others, but any of them should at least give you a feel for the structure of the Liturgy.

A well-known part of Orthodox spirituality is the practice of the 'Jesus prayer'. There are various books explaining how to make this a part of one's spiritual life, but a popular introduction is provided by the autobiographical accounts of an anonymous 19th century Russian pilgrim, *The Way of a Pilgrim* and *The Pilgrim continues his way*⁹ These present the heart of Russian teaching concerning this method of prayer as the pilgrim describes his sacrifice of all things in order to learn what it is to 'pray without ceasing' and his conversations with masters in the art of prayer. As one of them sums it up,

The continuous interior prayer of Jesus is a constant uninterrupted calling upon the divine Name of Jesus with the lips, in the spirit, in the heart; while forming a mental picture of His constant presence, and imploring His grace, during every occupation, at all times, in all places, even during sleep. The appeal is couched in these terms, 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.' One who accustoms himself to this appeal experiences as a result so deep a consolation and so great a need to offer the prayer always, that he can no longer live without it, and it will continue to voice itself within him of its own accord.¹⁰

Such an approach to spirituality is attracting many who are tired of activism and the frenetic search for novelty which mark much of the contemporary Evangelical and Charismatic movements, and a growing number of Evangelicals are turning to Orthodoxy¹¹. Michael Harper, once curate to John Stott and then secretary of the Fountain Trust, has described his own pilgrimage in *Into the Light*.¹² The emphasis in Harper's book is heavily on the theological arguments which led him to make such a move, but a more personal (and intensely moving) picture of what it felt like for a number of modern converts is provided by Peter Gillquist in *Coming Home and Becoming Orthodox*¹³. *Coming Home* comprises the testimonies of a number of Protestant pastors who have become Orthodox. *Becoming Orthodox* describes how a number of leaders in the American ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ

sought to replicate what they perceived as first-century Christianity in forming a body which became known as the Evangelical Orthodox Church; after a false start with another jurisdiction, about two thousand of this body were received into the Antiochian jurisdiction *en masse* in 1987. Their Metropolitan far-sightedly encouraged them to use their evangelistic skills and dynamism in commending the Orthodox faith to the world around, and they operate a publishing house (Conciliar Press) and publish a remarkable quarterly, *Again!*

The conversion of Franky (now Frank) Schaeffer to Orthodoxy was something of a *cause célèbre*, and he explains his reasons in *Dancing Alone: The Quest for the Orthodox Faith in the Age of False Religion*¹⁴. The book's first half critiques contemporary American society and religion. While Schaeffer has some pungent points to make about the doctrinal anarchy and spiritual bankruptcy which characterize post-Enlightenment western culture and the Evangelicalism which is so indebted to it, this section suffers from a distressingly vitriolic tone, which was also evident in some of the author's work as an Evangelical. This makes it difficult to consider the issues as carefully as they deserve, and I also found the section turgid and heavy going, perhaps because I am not sufficiently familiar with the American context. However, the second half is an exposition of conservative Orthodox faith, responding to both Protestantism and liberalising tendencies within Orthodoxy, and this I found at times quite moving. It occurred to me that his emphasis on the need for a historically-visible church, a widely used Orthodox argument which hits low-church Evangelicalism at its weakest spot, could be seen as simply carrying his father's emphasis on the historicity of Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection a stage further.

The flow of conversions in both directions has made dialogue between the two traditions a natural next step, though not without voices being raised in alarm on both sides; a significant report is available from the World Council of Churches, *Proclaiming Christ Today*.¹⁵ This covers the dialogue held at Alexandria in 1995 under the auspices of the WCC between representatives of the Chalcedonian Orthodox churches and Evangelicals from a variety of denominations. As well as a statement of agreed conclusions setting out the participants' views concerning the way forward for Orthodox-Evangelical relations, there are Orthodox and Evangelical perspectives on the church's missionary task, insights on how both sides might work together in certain aspects of this task, and a reflection (from the British Baptist, Professor John Briggs) on the common ground that was discovered. This report is essential reading for anyone concerned with relationships between Orthodox and Evangelicals, whether in the West or the East, not least because it helps us to understand how Evangelical missionary effort in Orthodox societies is sometimes perceived.

Tim Grass & Nick Needham (paragraphs marked)*

Footnotes

1 *Christian History* 54 (1997). pp. 52, £4.20, available in larger Christian bookshops or from the UK distributors of *Christianity Today*.

2 Timothy [Kallistos] Ware, *Orthodoxy* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, revised ed. 1993). pp. 359, £9.99, paperback, ISBN 0-14-014656-3.

3 Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, revised ed. 1995). pp. 161, £9.95, paperback, ISBN 0-913836-58-3.

4 *Ibid.* p. 28.

5 Seraphim Rose, *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future* (Platina, AL: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, revised ed. 1996). pp. 242, £4.50, paperback, ISBN 1-887904-00-X.

6 Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1957). pp. 252, £9.25, paperback, ISBN 0-227-67919-9.

7 Η ΘΕΙΑ ΛΕΙΤΟΥΡΓΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΕΝ ΑΓΙΟΙΣ ΠΑΤΡΟΣ ΗΜΩΝ ΙΩΑΝΝΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΧΡΥΣΟΣΤΟΜΟΥ/ *The Divine Liturgy of our Father among the Saints John Chrysostom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) pp. xix + 95. £7.99, paperback, ISBN 0-19-110012-9.

8 Isabel Florence Hapgood, *The Service Book of the Orthodox Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, first published 1922). pp. 615, £20.00, hardback.

9 *The Way of a Pilgrim*, tr. R.M French (London: Triangle, 2nd edition 1995). pp. xvi + 127, £4.99, paperback, ISBN 0-281-04856-8. *The Pilgrim continues his Way*, tr. R.M. French (London: Triangle, pp. vi + 120, £4.99, paperback, ISBN 0-281-04238-1.

10 *The Way of a Pilgrim*, pp. 8-9.

11 I have written about this in 'Why Evangelicals are joining the Orthodox churches', *Evangelicals Now*, (August 1997), p. 11.

12 Michael Harper, *Into the Light*. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997). £9.99, paperback.

13 Peter Gillquist (ed.), *Coming Home: Why Protestant Clergy are Becoming Orthodox* (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, 2nd ed. 1995). pp. 159, £7.25, paperback, ISBN 0-9622713-2-2.

Peter Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox: A Journey to the ancient Christian Faith* (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, revised ed. 1992). pp. xi + 191, £8.75, paperback, ISBN 0-9622713-3-0.

14 Frank Schaeffer, *Dancing Alone: The Quest for the Orthodox Faith in the Age of False Religion* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Press, 1994). pp. xix + 327, £14.25, paperback, ISBN 0-917651-36-7.

15 Huibert van Beek & Georges Lemopoulos (eds.), *Proclaiming Christ Today: Orthodox-Evangelical Consultation, Alexandria, 10-15 July, 1995* (Geneva/Bialystok: WCC/Syndesmos, 1995). pp. 63, no price (only available direct from WCC), paperback, ISBN 83-906958-0-4.