

Review Essays

**Metaphysics and its Role in Christian Division:
A Review Essay Discussing
David Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West:
Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom*
(Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 2006), 297 pp.**

The Divide of East and West: The Backdrop

Bradshaw sets out on an ambitious road to explain one of the most significant divisions within Christianity, that between East and West. The challenges to unified Christianity came from many quarters. Though Christianity was born within the context of Greco-Roman culture, her mother was Jewish, the fullness of the perfection of the history of Israel. The earliest challenges to Christianity came from within the Jewish world, in whose house Christianity continued to reside for a number of decades after Jesus died. After Pentecost, and after the center of missionary Christianity shifted from Jerusalem to Antioch, new kinds of questions and challenges arose. Greek culture included the search for truth via the road of *theoria*. This road was one of understanding the nature and causes of reality, and hence it was the “way” of Thales, Parmenides, and Pythagoras that flowered in Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. It went beyond storytelling and description. Stories about Jesus were not sufficient. What was His nature? Was He divine? Was He human? What was His relation to God? The Church answered these questions universally in ecumenical councils: Nicea proclaimed Jesus as *Homoousian* with the Father. Chalcedon in 451 declared Him one person with two natures. Notice these are not stories about Jesus, but rather metaphysical and philosophical truths about His being.

The introduction of language and insights that went beyond Scripture was itself a significant challenge within Christianity. Yet, in the name of proclaiming the gospel, it had to be

done. The apostles were commanded to go to the ends of the earth, and this included the Greek world of philosophy, which interestingly resulted in giving her an expression that was more universal in nature.

At the same time that some of the apostles and apologists were bring Christianity into the world of Greek philosophy, the Church was becoming incarnate liturgically and culturally in the various and diverse local regions throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. As this took place, differences arose, sometimes serious, which then needed to be addressed in local councils, and if widespread enough, in ecumenical councils. In these councils, one begins to see unity as well as the differences emerging from North Africa to Rome to Constantinople to Jerusalem to Alexandria. As the first millennium of Christianity progressed, the growing differences in Christianity roughly fell into two sides, the East and the West, though that divide is not always clear. One also has to introduce the social and political divisions that emerged especially after Constantine died, along with linguistic differences between Latin and Greek that grew after the second century. Hence, during the first millennium after the birth of Christ, the unity of Christianity was by no means one of uniformity and harmony.

By the year 1054, the differences culminated in serious divide on many levels, including that of the faith itself. Dogmatically, the divide centered upon the *filioque*, though implicit as well was the validity of ecclesiastical authority. The attempts to rebuild the fallen Roman Empire into a Christian empire initiated by Charlemagne two centuries earlier seemed to be coming to find a limit in the unification of East and West. Yet, not only are the causes of this serious rupture still being debated and explored, so is the nature of that divide. What in reality do the mutual excommunications between pope and patriarch mean when the one was dead by the time the other's letter was fully promulgated? And with the lifting of these excommunications in 1965, what is the status of the division of East and West? Political and social and theological divides certainly continue to exist, but these exist even within Catholic and Orthodox circles, and yet they are able to preserve eucha-

ristic communion. So what is the precise nature and character of the division?

Metaphysics as the Key to the Division

David Bradshaw argues that he has found one key piece, if not the key, needed to understand and explain the rupture – metaphysics. Many historical accounts of the divide neglect the philosophical or metaphysical differences that emerged between the East and West, a neglect which Bradshaw hopes to remedy.

The first five chapters layout the heart and source of Bradshaw's position – namely that the metaphysical key reduces to one basic term – *energeia*. These chapters examine the pre- and non-Christian history of the understandings and use of *energeia*. In chapter one, Bradshaw argues that Aristotle created the term to identify a key facet of metaphysics, though he argues it expresses two different elements, on the one hand the actuality and on the other the activity of being. In chapter two, Bradshaw examines Aristotle's understanding of the prime mover as active in relationship to the world, both in terms of efficient causality and more fully in terms of ongoing activity, of *energeia*. Next, he examines *energeia* as it was taken up, transformed, or neglected in various Hellenistic schools from the era immediately after Aristotle's death up until the era of Plotinus. Chapter 4 takes up the notion in Plotinus, and examines his "two acts," namely the internal act, and then the exterior acts produced by the *energeia* of the internal acts.¹ This distinction is applied not only to the prime mover, as in Aristotle, but to the whole of being, from the One all the way down to the lowest order of things. It creates an ordered "world view" with the One being the supreme illuminator of all that is, and thus the supreme "*energeia*." However, in the later Plotinus, there are some doubts as to how this One can move "externally" and thus be an *energeia* of the world. Chapter 5 then examines the inheritance of Plotinus in the

¹ Bradshaw, 76–77.