

In Support of a Radical Definition of Orthodoxy

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Abstract

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The author attempts to understand historically and then expand the definition of “Orthodoxy” through a discussion of Orthodox historiography, Orthodoxy “historiosophy,” and Orthodox history, showing that in each case the more narrow “confessional” definition of Orthodoxy is not always clearly supported by the facts of history and is not true to Orthodox theology itself, which must be understood in a newly pragmatic and ecumenical way. Drawing on the thought of such as Jean-Marc Ferry, Alexander Schmemmann, and Olivier Clément, Arjakovsky shows that Orthodox theology is not static and goes beyond the “orthodox” historical self-consciousness of a given era and even beyond the boundaries of the Orthodox Church. Orthodox identity is thus understood in a much more dynamic way as encompassing four periods and being expressed in four different modes: right glorification (eschatology), authentic faith (politics), true memory (confessionalism), and new life in Christ through the Spirit (sophiology). The author uses this four-fold schema to analyze the history and identity of the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church.



In their preface to the collection *Radical Orthodoxy*, John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward give definitions to the terms “radical” and “Orthodoxy.” *Radical Orthodoxy* (RO), as they define it, is the Christian faith conformed to its patristic roots. The establishment of RO is the rediscovery, following the critical period of the Middle Ages, of a more coherent and richer sense of Christianity.¹ That is why they deal with the term “Orthodox” beyond the confessional boundaries, since, in their opinion, “the Protestant biblicism and the post-tridentine [*sic*] Catholic positivist authoritarianism” were the “aberrant results of theological distortions already dominant even before the early modern period.”² As the authors note, during the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries, the concept of “participation” was lost in the West.

This participational view of theosis was so characteristic of the Orthodox Church that it would seem that the movement “Radical Orthodoxy” invites conversion to confessional Orthodoxy. However, this is not the case. Although some Orthodox thinkers in the United States have participated in this movement, although John Milbank cites Bulgakov, and William Cavanaugh Metropolitan John Zizioulas, the proponents of this movement are in some way reluctant to join those whom they call “the Eastern Orthodox.”

This confessional and provincial view of the Orthodox Church seems unfair to me. It contradicts the efforts of an entire generation of thinkers, from Sergius Bulgakov to Olivier Clément, directed so that the Orthodox Church be seen as completely universal. I think, nevertheless, that the “Radical Orthodoxy” movement asks the authentic question of Orthodoxy: “What is the radical definition and what is the orthodox definition of Orthodoxy?”

Before I answer this question, I would like to offer to you three short reflections of historiographical, “historiosophic,” and historical character.

¹ J. Milbank, C. Pickstock, G. Ward, *Radical Orthodoxy* (London: Routledge, 1999), 2–4.

² *Ibid.*, 2.

1. *Orthodoxy and Historiography*

The merit of Orthodox historiography is that it remembers the fact that the history of the Church is possible only if we admit that the Church, by herself, is a personal reality, which resumes the whole of history. The divinely-human nature of time makes it possible to understand why the historical story is evolutionary by itself. Our view of the past cannot be separated from our experience of time passing and of time coming.

One should just compare the *History of Religions*³ by Alexandr El'chaninov written at the beginning of the twentieth century in conjunction with Paul Florensky and Vladimir Ern with *The Church of the Seven Councils*⁴ by Kallistos Ware written in 1963, in order to verify my claim. In the twentieth century, Orthodox historiography became less ethnic and more open to its plural identity.

However, despite all efforts in the 1960's, the historians of Orthodoxy failed to compile the comprehensive story of "the historical way of Orthodoxy." Alexander Schmemmann did not manage to explain how it happened that after the rupture of 1054, western Christians became heterodox. In his wonderful work *Byzantium and Christianity*, Olivier Clément traces the Orthodoxy of western Christianity up to the Council of Florence and avoids the traditional cultural reduction of Orthodoxy to the Russian and Byzantine empires. However, in his essay on the Orthodox Church,⁵ published in 1961, he fails to be persuasive when he claims that the crisis of modernity, which had hurt the Western Orthodox Church, did not change the apostolic character of the Orthodox Church in the East. If there exists *physical* continuity between the Eastern Church and the Church of Apostles, the *historical* continuity between the Acts of the Apostles and the *Pedalion* (the manual of the canon law of the Greek Church) is not evident. Together with François Thual we can say that maintaining the cosmic con-

³ А. Эльчанинов, В. Ерн, П. Флоренский, *История Религий* (Русский Путь, 2004) (1909).

⁴ К. Ware, *L'Orthodoxie, L'Eglise des sept conciles* (Paris: DDB, 1997) (1963).

⁵ O. Clément, *L'Eglise Orthodoxe* (Paris: PUF, 1961), 5.