



Light from the Christian East: An Introduction to the Orthodox Tradition

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The Word Guild 2008 Canadian Christian Writing Awards winner! "Do they really pray to icons?" "Why do they use incense?" "What do they believe?" To many people, the Orthodox Christian tradition (or Eastern Orthodoxy) seems unfamiliar and mysterious. Yet this tradition is arguably the most faithful representative of early Christianity in existence today and numbers roughly 250 million adherents worldwide. What's more, a steady stream of evangelical Christians has been entering the Orthodox Church in recent decades. Isn't it time we gained a deeper understanding of Orthodoxy? In *Light from the Christian East*, James Payton gives us just that. With a sympathetic eye and even hand, he ushers readers into the world of Orthodox Christianity--its history, theology and religious practices. In doing so, he clears away the confusion and misunderstandings that often prevent non-Orthodox Christians from fully appreciating the riches of this ancient tradition. This book is essential reading for anyone interested in Orthodox Christianity.

Light from the Christian East: An Introduction to the Orthodox Tradition Details

Date : Published February 28th 2012 by IVP Academic (first published July 26th 2007)

ISBN : 9780830825943

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Format : Paperback 240 pages

Genre : Religion, Theology, Christianity, Church, Church History

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From Reader Review *Light from the Christian East: An Introduction to the Orthodox Tradition* for online ebook

Diane says

This book was written by a Protestant theologian as an introduction to the Eastern Orthodox tradition of Christianity. The book includes chapters on all of the major aspects of the tradition. It provides a good introduction to the differences between Eastern and Western Christianity.

Debbi says

I was delighted at James Payton's respectful and thoroughly researched take on the Orthodox Faith in *Light from the Christian East: Introducing the Orthodox Tradition*. This is the kind of book one can recommend to a non-Orthodox friend who's looking to gain a better understanding of the Eastern Christian tradition without having to feel like it's being shoved down their throat. Conversion stories, while very helpful and informative, often force the reader to take a position. This book is informing you on the Eastern Orthodox church and its beliefs rather than trying to preach Orthodoxy. Prof. Payton does spend some time each chapter encouraging Western readers to think about what can be gained in their own faith tradition by learning about Orthodoxy.

"There is much in the Eastern Orthodox understanding of the relationship of the Creator and his creation that can enrich our Western Christian perspectives about God and his relationship to the creation of which we are part and in which we live." pg.99

Payton is not Orthodox himself, but his respectful handling of the faith is refreshing in a day of internet polemics regarding East/West discussions. Here you will not find someone who has not just read a book about Orthodoxy or has gone to a service or two. Payton is a professor of Byzantine & Church History and, in his acknowledgments, it is evidenced that he has visited many different Orthodox churches and made friends and discussed much with many different Orthodox priests and theologians. Even though he is looking from the outside in he knows his stuff and he is deeply respectful to our faith.

Light from the Christian East would make an excellent companion book to either Metropolitan KALLISTOS' (Timothy Ware) *The Orthodox Church* or Fr. Anthony Coniaris' *Introducing the Orthodox Church*. However, it brings to the table a different perspective. Prof. Payton delves much more into the mind and perspective of the Orthodox Christian. He explains why we view God, Creation, theology, sin, the fall of man, and salvation the way we do. Rather than a list of what we believe or our history, he goes deeper and tries to understand the Eastern Orthodox mindset.

My one minor reservation with the book is the author's desire for Western Christians to use this knowledge to deepen their own faith walk (it is the only time he gets a bit preachy). I'm not sure that he meant it this way, but I would worry that people would fall into an attitude of "a-la-carte" Christianity, picking and choosing what they want or not. I would have preferred if the author had just shared the Orthodox faith and encouraged Western Christians to appreciate our differences.

If you looking for a book to better understanding of Eastern Christianity but don't want polemics or to be preached at about what is wrong with Western Christianity, I think *A Light from the Christian East* would be

a very good jumping off point.

Lisa Wuertz says

This book best deals with the East West contrast than some of the other books I have read. However, it is really academic in the approach. It isn't really user friendly in my opinion. There are a lot of good arguments and dealing with common conflicts between East and West, but overall I don't think this is a book you can just hand off to anyone asking questions about Orthodoxy. Particularly anyone without a college education. It is just too heady. It is no wonder why, about halfway in I found out an Orthodox friend of ours actually had Payton as a professor in college prior to his conversion (the friend's conversion, not Payton's) and the manuscript for this book was basically the class. I think it would be helpful to take the ideas and simplify them first or use them in conversation. A lot of it was just a bit over my head.

I skipped thru about a third of the book because I was really having a hard time keeping at it. Feel like when I went on my food industry book binge and at the end I just couldn't read another book on the subject, no matter how well written because it was all stuff I'd heard a billion different ways.

I think, for me, the top three chapters I got the most out of were "Western Reactions," which takes common Western arguments against Orthodoxy and deals with them; "Orthodoxy's Approach to Doctrine" which contrasts Western and Eastern approaches to theology; and "Icons" which deals with the arguments against icons.

Joseph says

great intro into Orthodoxy for Protestants who know a lot about their faith and where they came from. it's a bit dense in parts, so not for the casual reader, but has a depth of information not found in many other western-friendly books on EO.

Ephraim Lawson Bowick says

Absolutely phenomenal book. Explains the practice, praxis, as well as concise theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church whilst remaining objective (moderate Protestant) throughout the book. If you have grown weary of American Christianity, I strongly advise you look into this tome of apostolic insight. It's what helped draw me into the Orthodox Church.

Forgive me a sinner,

Lawson

Patrick Williams says

James Payton is a Reformed Christian who examines the doctrine and beliefs of the Orthodox Church. This is a well-written and good book to read. I would highly, highly recommend this to Christian who wants to understand who those strange "Orthodox" are. Whether your a Protestant or Catholic who just wants to learn about the Orthodox or a person who is contemplating becoming orthodox, I would recommend you to read this book.

Michael Clevenger says

Great read. Coupled with Metropolitan Kallistos Ware's The Orthodox Church; great primers on the OC and Patristic Fathers.

G Walker says

Payton does a very good job at making the Eastern tradition accessible to the West. This is a great introduction to Orthodoxy... vastly better than Clendenin. A nice supplement to Letham. It may strike one as deep at first, but once one gets their bearings, a second time through shows that what he wrote is actually fairly accessible. A very valuable tool for a truly "catholic" understanding of the church (in tradition, theology and practice). Good stuff.

Nate says

This was one of the best introductions for Protestants to engage with the Orthodox tradition. It presented the core of Eastern Christian theology in a way that Westerners could clearly understand. It made me really appreciate what Orthodoxy has to offer Christianity on the whole.

Christopher says

Over the past two decades, the Orthodox Church has intrigued many evangelical Christians in the United States. James R. Payton's LIGHT FROM THE CHRISTIAN EAST is one of the latest books that seek to introduce Eastern Christianity to evangelicals.

This is not an introduction to the Orthodox Church for general audiences. Unless you are a big fan of evangelical doctrinal debates, the best all-around presentation of Orthodoxy is Bishop Kallistos Ware's THE ORTHODOX CHURCH. If you are an evangelical but prefer something less academic and more personal, Peter Guillquist's BECOMING ORTHODOX is for you. Payton's work is more like Daniel B. Clendenin's EASTERN ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY in targeting an audience of evangelicals trained in theology and apologetics.

Payton's book is divided into chapters each dealing with one particular issue of theology that is viewed

differently in Orthodoxy than in general Protestantism. These include the relationship between the Creator and Creation, humanity as created and fallen, the accomplishment of salvation and its application, the nature of grace, and Orthodoxy's entire approach to doctrine. Payton does a good job of citing both Orthodox theologians and the main Protestant reformers in opposing the two perspectives. Payton makes a good case for the use of icons, using the same Scripture-based arguments as St John of Damascus.

As an Orthodox Christian, what I found unsatisfactory about Prof Payton's book is his belief that the Orthodox Church should be seen as a rich set of ideas that can be integrated into one's own denomination, when in fact the Orthodox Church teaches that it is **the** Church of Christ and all are called to it. I wish that Curnow had explained why he has chosen not to convert to Orthodoxy. It's puzzling that he has so many good things to say about the Church and its traditions, but he himself remains non-Orthodox.

Andrea says

I knew very little of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, and I knew very little of early Church history. This book shed light on much the practice and history of ancient Christianity. It challenged my assumptions, especially about sacraments and worship.

Je lis donc je suis says

Excellent read! This is my third book in the past couple of months on Orthodoxy and I would say that it does the best job so far on making this beautiful and colorful branch of the Church (probably really the root and trunk) accessible to those of us raised in the West, whether Catholic or Protestant. I highly recommend it. I will be buying a couple of paper copies of it to pass out to (Protestant) friends here in Orthodox Georgia to help people get beyond stereotypes. I am looking forward to joining the Divine Liturgy when the opportunity presents itself while I am here in Georgia.

Emma says

This book was recommended to me by my Orthodox godparents. Being a recent convert from Catholicism, with a large background in Western Christianity, I found this book excellent. The author belongs to the Protestant tradition, but he is also a Church historian, very well read in both Western and Eastern traditions.

I don't think I have ever read any book as good as this one presenting Orthodoxy from a Western point of view. It is extremely balanced and sympathetic – actually, all along I wondered how long it would take for the author to make the plunge and become Orthodox, as many other great Church historians, Jaroslav Pelikan being one of the latest ones.

He tackles all the major Christian themes, sums up the Western position, and then highlights what's common and different from an Orthodox point of view. His main point is that Western Christianity can learn so much from Eastern Christianity and have a broader and deeper understanding of Christianity.

The tone of the book is perfect, in the sense that there is no trace of polemic whatsoever, at least that was my feeling. This is very appreciable.

My Orthodox godfather, Philosophy and Religion teacher, has used it to introduce his students to Orthodoxy.

This is not an easy read, this is for study. But if you want to have a view of the whole of Christianity, this is for you.

As I read along, I posted a few excerpts – scroll down to see the relevant posts.

original post:

<http://wordsandpeace.wordpress.com/20...>

Emma @ Words And Peace

Linda says

Obviously a work of scholarship but not terribly useful to a reader who doesn't want a textbook. The index seems to lack terms like "creed," ("ancient creed" is not something it would occur to me to look up) "fasting," "Antiochian" and others that I would have found useful. Still, worth reading gradually.

Lindsay Dee says

This is an awesome introduction to Orthodox faith for a Western Catholic or Protestant. It includes many insights concerning what Western Christianity has to learn from its Eastern brothers and sisters.
