

The Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity

John Anthony McGuckin, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 2 vols.: 833 pp. \$350.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9781405185394 (set).

Less than one percent of the American population belongs to Orthodox churches, but their numbers are growing each year, as is their presence in academic circles. *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity* is an attempt to do justice to the ancient and formidable history of Eastern Orthodoxy while revitalizing Orthodox intellectual life in the modern day.

Editor John Anthony McGuckin has excellent credentials for undertaking this work. He is Nielsen Professor of Early Church History at Union Theological Seminary, as well as Professor of Byzantine Christian Studies at Columbia University. He is a widely respected scholar who has authored twenty other books and over one hundred articles. His associate editors are Julia Konstantinovskiy of Wolfson College, Oxford, and Justin Lasser of Columbia University.

In the preface and acknowledgements, McGuckin shows his deep concern with the intellectual revival of Orthodoxy in the modern West. As he points out, Orthodoxy has suffered through five centuries of oppression, all while preserving the essentials of its faith. It is hardly surprising that some intellectual vibrancy was lost in this struggle to survive. Professor McGuckin is indeed correct when he says that “the encyclopedia is itself one bright sign of the emerging revival of Orthodox intellectual life at the highest levels of the Academy...” (xxii). The list of contributors (two pages long) is a Who’s Who of Orthodox scholars in the West, and spans multiple jurisdictions and ethnic backgrounds. The fact that these volumes were produced by English-speaking Orthodox scholars further points to the continued integration of both immigrant and convert scholars into western intellectual life.

This *Encyclopedia* fills a useful gap in the reference literature. There are reference options for libraries that are not specifically religious in theme but cover a great deal of Orthodox material, such as the magisterial three-volume *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, and of course Orthodox material is included in almost any reference work dealing with the early church. In recent years specifically Orthodox reference works have appeared, such as the very handy *Historical Dictionary of the Orthodox Church*, edited by Michael Prokurat, Alexander Golitzin, and Michael D. Peterson. As a dictionary, however, its length and scope were much different. It was only half as long, with shorter entries, and was more modern in topic choices (which the editors based on the fact that other reference works have covered the early church extensively).

In comparison, the scope of the present work is enormous, covering all of the Eastern Orthodox and other Eastern Christian churches around the world, from ancient until modern times. History, theology, liturgical rituals, church councils, and dozens of other topics are covered. There are also four helpful maps and seventy-nine well-chosen photographs showing Orthodox people around the world. Entries vary in length from 100 to 6,000 words depending upon the topic, and include cross-references and suggested readings, most from recent literature. Many entries are interpretive essays. For instance, Timothy J. Becker’s entry “World Religions, Orthodoxy and” concludes that Orthodox relationships with other religions will have to move forward, and “clichés about other religions will have to be replaced by a deeper and closer study of what these religions actually do and teach” (644). The entry on “Women in Orthodoxy” by Niki J. Tsironis begins, “The relatively marginal place of women in the contemporary Orthodox Church (as compared with the Western Christian denominations) might lead the casual

observer to the assumption that this has always been the case in the tradition of Eastern Christianity” (636). Tsironis then proceeds to a detailed discussion of women’s roles in the early church, including as deaconesses. Furthermore, some entry titles may surprise western readers who are not familiar with recent developments within Orthodoxy. For example, there is a five-page entry on “Ecology,” which lays out an extensive Orthodox framework for an understanding of the natural world, followed by a listing of twenty-five suggested Orthodox readings on the topic.

The most surprising part of the *Encyclopedia* comes at the end, with an Appendix called “Foundational Documents of Orthodox Theology” that extends from pages 647 to 771. This is actually a book in its own right, in which McGuckin has modernized selected translations from the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church*. Although these texts are available elsewhere, this concise collection of major dogmatic texts in the back of an encyclopedia is, so far as I know, highly unusual. McGuckin places the Nicene Creed as the “tent pole” of the appendix, but arranged after it are documents from the [first] seven ecumenical councils, as well as “The Five Theological Orations of St. Gregory of Nazianzus” and excerpts from John of Damascus’ “Exposition of the Orthodox Faith.” Notes are unfortunately omitted, though this was no doubt necessary for space reasons. McGuckin explains that he has not presented devotional or liturgical literatures because they are more readily available elsewhere, and that he sees these texts as ancient bases for the modern commentary upon them in the encyclopedia articles. These materials are foundational for both western and eastern churches and should be helpful to a wide variety of students and teachers.

In any large-scale undertaking, there are a few minor things one might change. It takes the reader a moment to realize that the editors decided to present all saints together under the letter S (from pages 507-558), presumably to stress the communion of the saints. I also think outsiders to the faith might find some of the entry headings difficult to predict. There are no entries for Pascha (Easter) or for Lent, which are the focal points of the Eastern Christian year. They are instead subsumed under the headings “Calendar” and “Feasts” with a bit more treatment of Lent under “Fasting.” To find a discussion of the Lenten liturgical book, you would already have to know that it was called the “Triodion” (though you could also trace it through the heading “Liturgical Books”). Librarians should also be aware that some entries presume a significant amount of background knowledge and might not be good starting points for beginners in Orthodox studies. For example, seminary students would find a great deal of use in an entry such as “Contemporary Orthodox Theology” by Aristotle Papanikolaou, which gives a general overview that could start a western student on a productive track for research. However, it presumes that the reader can readily comprehend references to the distinction between the essence and energies of God, the humanity of God, and Sophiology. In fairness, however, the editors never claim this collection is for beginners, and cross-references are given for numerous other articles that will help with an understanding of these topics.

The audience for these volumes will clearly be scholars, graduate students, and advanced undergraduates in religious studies. With the linking of the entries and the appendix, the purchaser of these remarkable volumes gains both a fascinating set of articles and a collection of primary sources that would be particularly useful for teaching. The editors of this encyclopedia have created an outstanding work that is itself a model for contemporary Orthodox intellectual achievement. It is an essential holding for any serious theological library and highly recommended for purchase.

Caren C. Stayer
Strayer University

