

REVIEWS

- Richard P. Bucher
*The Ecumenical Luther: The Development and Use of His
 Doctrinal Hermeneutic* 242
 Reviewed by Paul Hinlicky
- Richard A. Muller
After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition 245
 Reviewed by Randall C. Zachman
- Charles H. H. Scobie
The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology 249
 Reviewed by Daniel J. Treier

REVISITING ORTHODOXY AND NATIONALISM¹

Mihail Neamtu

A recent series of public lectures on Eastern Christianity, generously hosted by the Metropolitan University of Manchester, was presented to the public under the heading of "multicultural studies."

Instinctively, many Orthodox Christians will bristle on hearing of this characterization. Perhaps unintentionally, it suggests a sort of patronizing relativism that views the Eastern Church as an interesting and noteworthy piece of exotica, but not as the bearer of universal value or truth. Indeed the word "multiculturalism" can sometimes refer to a relativist philosophy that rejects any possibility of universal truths or moral precepts. Partly for that reason, many Orthodox Christians might react by saying that any public presentation of their faith should focus on its theological message, rather than its cultural packaging. First and foremost, some would say, such presentations ought to deal with the spiritual contents of Orthodoxy, or its claim to be the "right faith," or literally the right way to glorify God among the various Christian confessions.

In support of that view, it could be pointed out that from its very beginning, the Christian Church has regarded cultural difference as something of relative importance at most, as something that pales before Christianity's universal message about the divine vocation of humankind as a whole. In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul makes it clear that "there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him" (Rom. 10:12). In Christ, whose body is the church, all ethnic, linguistic, or racial differences should become immaterial.

Mihail Neamtu, New Europe College, Str. Plantelor 21, 023971 Bucharest, Romania. E-mail: mihailneamtu@gmail.com

1. The author thanks Mr. Bruce Clark for the invaluable comments and stylistic improvements made to this paper.

But before we find too much fault with those Mancunian lectures, we have to admit that in their own presentation of themselves to the outside world, today's Orthodox Christians also tend to stress the national over the universal. To present a slight caricature, their message can sound something like this: Ruritanian Orthodoxy is an indelible, inseparable part of the ancient culture and glorious history of Ruritania—so anybody who accepts and loves Ruritania had better love and accept us, too. Such messages are delivered in a spirit that seems subconsciously to fear that if the church dared to speak of Christianity itself, of the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection, the potential audience would be much smaller.

Therefore, it is worth asking some careful, rigorous questions about the way in which the universal and the particular come together in the life and the terminology of the Orthodox Christian world. What do people mean, for instance, when they refer to the "Romanian Orthodox Church"? In the spirit of "conciliarity," which is an essential component of Orthodox ecclesiology, one might answer as follows: They mean the Christian community governed by the Romanian Patriarchate of Bucharest, found in communion with all the other Orthodox patriarchates in the inhabited world (*oikoumene*).

In one sense, however, there is not, literally speaking, any such thing as the Romanian Church, or even the Romanian Orthodox Church. The latter institution counts among its members, at least formally, hundreds of thousands of people whose ethnic origin is something other than Romanian (e.g., Roma, Ukrainian, Hungarian).² There are also plenty of Romanians who belong to other Christian confessions, such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Uniate Church, and many neo-Protestant churches (Baptist, Pentecostal, Adventist, and so on). So it can easily be argued that the Romanian Orthodox Church, in its self-perception and self-description, is laying claim to a perfect match between religious and national identity that is not borne out by real life. Many other "national" Orthodox churches make similar claims with a similarly weak relationship

2. In 1995, the Romanian Orthodox Church had 21 bishoprics, 8,941 parishes, 12,546 churches, 8,729 priests, 19,802,389 members, 351 monasteries counting 6,781 monks and nuns, 14 higher institutions of education (faculties), 28 seminaries, and 33 religious magazines. See *Vestitural Ortodoxiei* (Bucharest) 143–144 (October 1995), pp. 4–7. The census in 2002 showed that out of 535,140 self-declared Gypsies (the real figures being probably higher), 438,162 (namely 81.87%) claimed to be Orthodox Christians. Additionally, 48,262 Ukrainians, 28,287 Hungarians, 20,476 Serbs, 9,655 Russians ("Lipovens" from Dobrogea), 6,017 Greeks, 5,246 Germans, 1,482 Bulgarians, 1,213 Armenians, and even 154 Tatars confessed to being Orthodox Christians. It is also important to note that in 2002 fewer Romanians declared themselves Orthodox (only 18,251,823). This represents a dramatic drop of 1,550,556 (a decrease of 7.83% in a period of just seven years. Also, at the same time, 345,557 Romanians belonged to the Roman Catholic Church, while 168,096 were members of the Uniate (Greek Catholic) Church. Surprisingly, 106,405 Romanians were Baptist Christians, 276,381 were Pentecostal, and 78,225 belonged to the Adventist Church. Interestingly, only 6,671 Romanians professed to be atheists. See the official data authorized by the Romanian government at <http://www.insse.ro/rpl2002rezgen/rp2002.htm>.

to reality. Small wonder then that there exists a real crisis of identity and authority in parts of the Balkans and Eastern Europe. Perhaps the only hope of resolving this crisis lies in looking more closely at the relationship between ethnicity and religiosity, or, to put it differently, between the cultural "accidents" of the church and her theological substance.

The current crisis stems, in part, from the habit of presenting the church in mainly national terms. In so doing, it does not always succeed in its apparent aim, which is to appeal to the widest possible constituency. In the past seven years, the Romanian Orthodox Church has lost more than a million of her former members, all of Romanian origin. There are clear signs that the ethnic label of the Orthodox Church has lost its appeal to a younger generation of Romanians who have been mesmerized by Western European cosmopolitanism.

So when presented with the paradoxical, and at times tendentious, version of modern national history that their churches are wont to proclaim, urban and well-educated Christians of the East are likely in the future to respond with as much skepticism as any Westerner would. One inevitably wonders how much longer the Romanian Orthodox Church, and her sister churches in the region, can go on playing the role they have carved out for themselves—as embodiments of national pride.

Already, there are some negative signs: for example, the fact that Romania's traditionally minded church seems unable to cope with revisionist discourses put forward recently by some historians,³ who challenge some of the long-established foundational myths of Romanian history.

For some Westerners, either secular or Christian (be it Roman Catholic or Protestant), the very idea of a national church is, to say the least, confusing.⁴ The same goes for an Orthodox Christian who has been born and

3. An excellent exposition and balanced critique of the "historiographic metafiction" forged by the Romanian autochthonist thinkers (among whom one counts not very few Orthodox theologians), see S. Antohi, "Romania and the Balkans: From Geocultural Bovarism to Ethnic Ontology," *Transit-Virtuelles Forum* 21 (2002), online version. Antohi refers to, and relies on the critical investigations mounted up recently by, "revisionist historians" such as Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, trans. by James Christian Brown (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001), reviewed by Frederick Kellogg in *Slavic Review* 61 (Autumn 2002), pp. 603–4; and Sorin Mitu, *National Identity of Romanians in Transylvania* (Budapest: Central European University, 2001). For an insight into the complexities of the religious life of the Romanian peasants from Maramures (bypassed in the Romantic accounts of church historiography), see the anthropological study of Gail Kligman, *The Wedding of the Dead: Ritual, Politics, and Popular Culture in Transylvania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). In conversation with Kligman's book one should read the studies written in an ironic trope by Claude Karnoouh, *Vivre et survivre en Roumanie communiste: Rites et discours versifiés chez les paysans du Maramures* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998); for a less idyllic description of the peasant life in Communist and post-Communist Romania, see David A. Kideckel, *The Solitude of Collectivism: Romanian Villagers to the Revolution and Beyond* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

4. This is the leitmotif of the recent and intriguing book by Victoria Clark, *Why the Angels Fall: A Journey of Orthodox Europe from Byzantium to Kosovo* (Oxford: MacMillan, 2000).

brought up in the multicultural context of Western society.⁵ A church discourse that puts overwhelming emphasis on national affiliation is also unpalatable to academic theologians and Bible scholars, who see in such talk a sort of sectarianism that strays a long way from the essence of the faith. Indeed, neither readers of the New Testament nor those more familiar with patristic writings could quote a single sentence that lends comfort to the view that the Christian faith is at bottom an ethnic reality, with nationalist aspirations, such as the edification of the motherland.

That fact does not deter the practitioners of nationalist church discourse from ascribing an eternal, transcendental significance to the facts of modern history, which are in any case more complex than they acknowledge. In the case of the Romanian Orthodox Church, it was only the political union of Wallachia and Moldavia in 1859 that made possible the international recognition of an Orthodox patriarchate in Bucharest. That is, perhaps, a significant detail of modern European history, but it is hardly a great, transcendental truth.

It is true, and perhaps tautological, to say that without the creation of the modern state of Romania, the Romanian Orthodox Church would not have existed, either in theory or in reality. That, however, is a statement about secular history, not about theology; and it is only by discovering her theology that the church will avoid becoming trapped in an ethnic or national ghetto. On the other hand, that does not mean that the church—viewed as a spiritual reality—has nothing to do with history, or that the church exists on some abstract, “otherworldly” plane at a safe distance from the concrete ground of human experience.

If the two main currents of European thought are, very broadly speaking, either “idealist” or “realist,” then it is to the latter camp that Christianity belongs. It is a faith that must be lived and died for, not simply a set of hypothetical principles. While it does demand a commitment to the doctrines laid down by the ecumenical councils, Orthodox Christianity is certainly not reducible to a set of regulatory principles that ignore the historicity of our human predicament. Orthodoxy is, rather, a way of life revealed at the frontiers of time and eternity. It redeems the past, contains the present, and opens up the future, from glory to glory. That is perhaps why genuine Orthodoxy does not patronize our intelligence, talking from

5. In the West, there is a strong recognition of this status quo (rooted in the modern discovery of the generic Other). For a particular study on this subject, see W. Cenkner, ed., *Multicultural Churches: A New Landscape in U.S. Theologies* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996). Consider, too, the difference between the way the Orthodox understand the unity and the catholicity of the church, in comparison with Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians. Often, one comes across a substantive difference. For the given context, it should be enough to say that the Orthodox are neither keen to emphasize the church's need for a visible center of authority (i.e., the papacy), nor to regard the body of Christ as an entirely invisible entity, which doesn't have clear criteria for communion and conciliarity.

above; on the contrary, it enthralles both mind and heart, speaking to every person from within of things that are infinitely broader than any national or ethnic project.

Orthodox Christianity did not enter history *ex nihilo*, without preparation or announcement. The full picture of the Orthodox way of life has been shown at sundry times in the sacred story of Israel, recapitulated and sublimated by the Divine Liturgy. Through its liturgical acts of purification and sanctification, the Orthodox Church offers a space for the actualization of God's descent among his people. The Divine Liturgy is the manifestation of God's ongoing glory, which makes us children of light in the new kingdom.

The church liturgy contains both the sober expectation and gentle advent of Christ. In the eucharistic liturgy, the church also contemplates and embraces Christ's perpetual second coming, the perpetual reality of the Parousia. As the Creed of Nicaea (325 A.D.) proclaims, both the past and future events of salvation history can be narrated retrospectively and visualized in anticipation. This is simply because the foundational events that constitute and legitimize the church possess their own epistemological objectivity. The Scriptures, written in the matrix of the ecclesial Tradition, are the records of Christ's works.

The church could not be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic body if she were not first of all real, incarnated, and spread out in the world, against the fickleness of our human nature. As the same Nicene Creed tells us, the church is universal as long as she remains apostolic. It is this last attribute that manifests the historical dimension of Orthodoxy and prepares, on a horizontal dimension, for the emergence of her universality. The church is apostolic because she is missionary, and because she inherits and carries out the mandate of her founding fathers. Traditional Christians are never too shy to invoke the holy fathers in theology and worship, in private or public prayers, whether during the office of the Divine Liturgy or on less solemn occasions. This permanent remembrance of the past (which counts for more than what H.-G. Gadamer meant by *wirkungs-geschichtliches Bewusstsein*⁶) is a distinctive feature of Eastern Orthodoxy. In their reading of the Scriptures and their rule of prayer, Orthodox Christians are accustomed to memorizing the past and remembering the half-fulfilled promise of the future. Without doubt, the church inherits this feature from the people of Abraham, the father of faith and the icon of hope for both the old and the new Israel.

In short, Orthodoxy must be recognized as both theological and historical. If it is not to lapse into ideology, Orthodoxy is bound to express the faith of the universal church, which professes Christ, the incarnate

6. See H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 267-344.

Word, as her Lord and God (John 20:28). Having its faith in the God who made and transformed human history, Orthodoxy is, a fortiori, cultural. Two more qualifications are required here. First, Orthodoxy is to be understood *both* as right faith and as right worship. Complex and demanding as it may be, it is public worship, rather than any university lecture, however brilliant, that expresses the genius of Orthodoxy. The very elaborate forms of worship that exemplify the culturally pluralist vocation of Eastern Christianity should be construed in theological terms.

Thus, in its essence Orthodoxy has the potential, to a far greater extent than any narrow nationalist message, to show us the real meaning of history—and of all cultures, not just one. Orthodoxy is cultural because it goes back to the roots of human culture (*cultus*).⁷ As many great anthropologists and historians of religion of the last century taught us, the essence of all human cultures (and not just of the archaic ones) is to be found in worship or ritual.⁸ The roots of our cultural existence are transcendental: Wherever human beings find themselves, they feel the urge to worship. Human beings, the Church Fathers teach, will venerate gods or idols if they live in falsehood. They will worship the one God of heaven and earth if they abide in truth.⁹

By understanding this, we gain a vision of Orthodoxy in all her theological and cultural glory. When I say Orthodoxy is transcendentially cultural, I also mean that the church is historically multicultural, though not multiculturalist.

On the day of Pentecost, the church, gathered in Jerusalem, had to acknowledge, not without difficulty, her multicultural character (Acts 2-3).¹⁰ Like that community of the early Christians, Orthodox Christianity today, and in all recent centuries, has been composed of a great multitude of nations and languages, local traditions, and different theological schools. Church iconography in the Romanian tradition is quite distinct from Russian iconography, influenced by the Cretans. Russian music,

polyphonic par excellence, differs radically from Greek ecclesiastical chant. The intensely local veneration of St. Parascheva in Moldavia (feasted on 14 October) has its equivalent in the Hellenic devotion to the great martyr Demetrios, patron saint of Thessalonike. An overwhelming diversity can be found not just in music or iconography but also in church architecture or even in some liturgical and devotional customs.

Artificial uniformity has never been an obsession of Orthodox Christians. In the Orthodox world one finds great respect for particularity, and the early theologians—such as St. Paul, St. Irenaeus of Lyon, or St. Basil the Great—saw in these circumstances the confirmation of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church. However, thanks to its eschatological narrative, Orthodoxy does not see itself as just *one* culture among others. Orthodoxy does not accommodate the idea of epistemological relativity. It does not accept its secular condemnation to social irrelevance and historical death. On the contrary, Orthodoxy claims to know the roots of all human cultures, of their positive diversity and negative divisiveness. It also claims to be able to show us the way back to God's initial plan, the unity and coherence of which we have lost since Adam's fall.

One should try not to regard, and even less to live, Orthodoxy as if this faith were the result of a historical accident such as the formation of the Romanian, or any other, state. To be Christian does not *ultimately* depend on any racial, linguistic, or cultural inheritance. Nor does the reverse apply. To be Orthodox cannot possibly represent an essential component or even a secondary feature of one's personal Greekness or Russianness. (Note that these substantial determinations are in themselves problematic.) Understood theologically, Orthodoxy can never be the bedrock of tribalism and sectarianism. On the contrary, Orthodoxy is that universal identity, born and preserved in the church through an event of conversion (i.e., baptism) that implies change both on the personal level of existence and within the life of the community. Being historical, Orthodoxy recognizes the dignity of cultural differences. Being eschatological, Orthodoxy absorbs and transfigures all local perspectives into one global vision of humankind. The catholicity of Orthodoxy is vertical. It looks upward.

Even to talk about *Eastern* Orthodoxy makes little sense, in part because nowadays there are millions of Orthodox Christians living in the West. A more important point is that the apostolic church always regarded the "East" as a spiritual reality, resembling the celestial Jerusalem. The rhetoric of division between East and West occurred only later in the polemical discourses of the ecclesiastical elites (anticipating or paralleling the more popular contrasts drawn between the Greeks, or the *Romaiotai*, and the Latins, or, rather, the Franks).¹¹

7. See P. Florensky, *Iconostasis*, trans. by Donald Sheehan and Olga Andrejev (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996).

8. R. Segal, ed., *The Myth and Ritual Theory: An Anthology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). See in particular Professor Segal's introduction.

9. Tertullian, *De idolatria* 1: "The principal crime of the human race, the highest guilt charged upon the world (*summus secuti reatus*), the whole procuring cause of judgment, is idolatry. For, although each single fault retains its own proper feature, although it is destined to judgment under its own proper name also, yet it is marked off under the *general* account of idolatry."

10. As Dr. Stephen Thomas writes, "in practice 'local church' means a cultural, national, or linguistic grouping, recognized in terms of conciliarity by all the other local churches of the Orthodox Church. There is no 'Orthodox Church' which is not visibly local, just as 'Oxford University' does not exist except as a collection of colleges who recognize one another. The term 'collegiality' can be used, actually, in reference to conciliarity." (Private letter communicated on 1 September 2004.)

11. H. Chadwick, *East and West: The Making of a Rift in the Church: From Apostolic Times until the Council of Florence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

While trying to understand the inner conflicts of the Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe today, one always has to bear in mind something far more important: the theological self-definition of Orthodoxy as the universal body of Christ. Only based on this theological catholicity, experienced as a gift to all humankind and not as something deserved by a particular group, can one experience the full brilliance of Orthodoxy: not as a local form of exotica or curiosity but as a universal gift that can be received in an infinite number of ways.

ECUMENICAL TASKS IN RELATIONSHIP TO THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH¹

Wolfgang Pannenberg

The current state of ecumenical dialogue between the churches of the Reformation and Rome, and between the Lutheran churches and Rome, is not encouraging. A few years ago things were different. With the signing of the Official Common Statement of the Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in 1999, there was some hope that an understanding on the other doctrinal differences that exist between Rome and the churches of the Reformation had become possible. Based on the German study of sixteenth-century condemnations—published under the title *Lehrverurteilungen—kirchentrennung?* in 1994 and subsequently accepted, although not without some reservation, by the responsible ecclesial committees on the Lutheran side—these doctrinal differences included two other important topics in addition to justification, namely, the doctrines of the sacraments and ministry. The results of the Condemnation Study regarding the topic of justification were received and affirmed beyond Germany—that is, internationally—by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Yet, in many German Protestant circles this reception and affirmation was met with a lack of understanding, primarily because they had expected a direct, reciprocal reaction by Rome to the positive reception of the Condemnation Study results by German ecclesial committees. This expectation was not realistic in large part because the consensus reached in Germany was initially only a regionally adopted result. A statement by the whole

Wolfgang Pannenberg, Emeritus Professor of Systematic Theology at the Protestant Theological Faculty, University of Munich, Sudetenstr. 8, 82166 Gräfelfing, Germany

1. Guest lecture at the University of Münster, 28 January 2004, trans. by Fr. Edward Rommen.