LIGHT *from the* CHRISTIAN EAST

An Introduction to the Orthodox Tradition

JAMES R. PAYTON JR.

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IVP Academic
An imprint of InterVarsity Press
Downers Grove, Illinois

InterVarsity Press
P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515-1426
World Wide Web: www.ivpress.com
E-mail: email@ivpress.com

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ISBN 978-0-8308-7850-5 (digital)
ISBN 978-0-8308-2594-3 (print)

To Sharon

who has brought light into my life

in so many ways

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Acknowledgments

I AM INDEBTED TO MANY PEOPLE WHO HAVE contributed to this book in various ways. My first debt, in order, is to Clair Davis, professor of church history at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, under whom I first studied Eastern Orthodoxy. Through his course I was introduced to a field of study which has continued to intrigue me for more than thirty years. Several Orthodox scholars have further stimulated my interest in and understanding of the faith they embrace: the works of John Meyendorff, Kallistos (Timothy) Ware, Alexander Schmemann and Vladimir Lossky have been sources of continual enrichment. From Western Christian authors, I am especially indebted to volumes written by Jaroslav Pelikan (who in 1998 converted to Orthodoxy).

Over the last twenty years, the priests and congregations of several Orthodox parishes in Hamilton, Ontario—St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church, Holy Resurrection Romanian Orthodox Church, St. Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Cathedral, Panagia Greek Orthodox Church and St. Vladimir Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral—have accorded me and my students (fellow Western Christians, all) gracious reception and unstinting hospitality at many Orthodox services and events; I am grateful to them all. I am especially indebted to Fr. Stevo Stojsavljevich of St. Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Cathedral and to Fr. Bohdan Hladio of St. Vladimir Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral (since 2005 serving as Chancellor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada), for frequent conversation, encouragement and patience as I plied them with questions and sought to benefit from their understanding and experience. This book could not have been written without them.

I am grateful for the sabbatical granted me in 1999 by Redeemer University College, which allowed me to focus entirely on the early stages of this project. I am also indebted to several colleagues at Redeemer: I have enjoyed and benefited from discussions about Eastern Orthodoxy with David Koyzis, Wayne Norman,

Jacob Ellens, Al Wolters and David Benner (now Distinguished Professor of Psychology at the Psychological Studies Institute, Atlanta, Georgia); two others, Jitse van der Meer and Tom McCormick, offered helpful comment on earlier drafts of some chapters of the book. Over the years, many students have taken the course on Eastern Orthodoxy which I have taught for several years at Redeemer; I have been enriched by their interest in learning and fascination with an approach to the Christian faith so different from their own. Their frequent assurances that they found the study intellectually, spiritually and personally enriching encouraged me to put into book form what we had considered together.

I am deeply indebted to my editor, Joel Scandrett, and his colleagues at InterVarsity Press. They have been unfailingly encouraging, supportive and helpful throughout the process that has led to the publication of this book. I am also grateful to Bradley Nassif and James Stamoolis, as well as an unnamed Orthodox scholar from Romania, who painstakingly read through an earlier draft of this book and offered valuable suggestions for its improvement. Their work has made this a much better volume. I also express my gratitude to Judy Reveal, who prepared the author and subject indexes. For any errors or faults that remain, I am solely responsible.

I am also grateful for the privilege of teaching a course on Eastern Orthodoxy and the annual two-term church history sequence offered at Redeemer University College. This has afforded me the opportunity to devote special attention over the last two decades both to Orthodoxy and to the church fathers, whose writings are so important within Orthodoxy. I have frequently cited patristic writings in the material which follows; unless otherwise noted, all patristic translations are my own.

Last, but certainly not least, I express my deep gratitude to my wife, Sharon, and to our children, Chris (and Liza), Trevor (and Erin), Jessica and Chris. Family life ablaze with the mysteries of joy, trust and love is a wonderful preparation for exploring Eastern Orthodoxy.

Prologue

This book is for Western Christians who would like to learn more about Eastern Orthodoxy. For those who have learned to appreciate the insights of other Christian traditions than their own, this book offers the opportunity to be enriched by one with which few of us in the West are well acquainted. Eastern Christianity has its own distinctive approaches to the faith, and studying these Orthodox distinctives can be stimulating and edifying.

In this ecumenical age, we have found that faithful Christians can listen to and profit from others without forsaking either their own tradition or the Christian faith, and can do so without falling into a boundary-less relativism. Western Christians and Eastern Orthodox can and should speak with and listen to each other in ways that enable us to enrich each other and together draw nearer to that fullness of development to which we are all called in Christ (Eph 4:13). This book is offered as a contribution to such dialogue.

In what follows, I will clarify some terms used in this volume. After that, I will briefly indicate why we in the Christian West have usually known little about the Christian East. Then I will point out the particular focus of the treatment that follows, so readers will know what to expect.

Terminology

As to the terminology adopted in this book, first of all, "Western Christianity" is a general term encompassing both Roman Catholics and Protestants, with all the subsets of the latter—including mainline churches, evangelicals, the "free" churches, charismatics of various stripes and fundamentalists. We Western Christians have usually been more aware of the differences between us than the similarities which mark us, so the term may at first be surprising, even in our ecumenically open age. Suffice it to note here that Eastern Christians, for all the differences they acknowledge among Western Christians, nevertheless discern

overarching similarities among us. They have observed that, while Western Christians often have opposing views, those views are all responses to the same basic questions; those questions have shaped Western Christianity. However, Eastern Christianity has been shaped by significantly different questions.[1] Thus, the Orthodox discern a similarity in basic approach throughout Western Christianity, an approach different from the one Eastern Christianity has taken.

Second, we will often use the designation "Orthodox" or "Orthodoxy" without the adjective, "Eastern." While it has become common for Western Christians to refer to "*Eastern* Orthodoxy," this is not the usual Orthodox practice: they rarely use the adjective, unless they are consciously relating to Western Christianity. This book will follow this Orthodox pattern: when a contrast is being pointed out with Western Christianity (or if clarity otherwise recommends it for Western Christian readers), "*Eastern* Orthodoxy" will be used. When we are dealing with the teachings and practice of Eastern Christianity itself, we will use the designation "Orthodox."

Third, "Eastern Orthodoxy" and "Eastern Christianity" will be used interchangeably. I acknowledge that "Eastern Christianity" is actually somewhat broader than "Eastern Orthodoxy," since Eastern *Christianity* includes, in addition to the Orthodox, a few churches which split from the main body of Orthodoxy along the historical way. However, these churches—collectively called *Oriental* Orthodox—are few in number by comparison with the Eastern Orthodox, and we in the West are less likely to encounter them. Beyond this argument from size and presence, though, I note that even the distinctions between the Oriental Orthodox and the Orthodox mainstream are variations on a shared approach, one different in striking regards from Western Christian perspectives. Using Eastern Orthodoxy (or Orthodoxy) and Eastern Christianity as synonyms will allow for variation in terminology and still honor the basic Eastern Christian perspective.

Finally, when I use the designation "the West," I intend the geographical and cultural area where Western Christianity has developed over the last several centuries—specifically, Western Europe and North America. Orthodoxy's historical pathway has wound through Eastern Europe and Russia, as well as the Middle East. References to "the Christian West" intend no claim to specifically Christian foundations of any Western nations or any comment as to the actual practice of

[1]For a pointed presentation of this assessment, see the excerpts from the third letter of the nineteenth-century Russian lay theologian Alexei Khomiakov to William Parker (November 28, 1846), as cited in chap. 1, n. 2 (www.geocities.com/trvalentine/orthodox/khomiakov_palmer03.html).

Christianity in the West; the same qualification applies to my usage of "the Christian East." What I am referring to with either designation is the geographic area within which Western Christianity or Eastern Christianity developed and flourished.

Why Has Orthodoxy Remained Unknown to Us?

Why, though, have we in the Christian West usually known so little about Eastern Orthodoxy? In large part, that situation can be accounted for by historical factors—what we have focused on in Western historical study and also what has happened to the Orthodox in the last few centuries. In the West, our historical awareness has rarely ventured east of the German-speaking lands of Europe; our familiarity with the history of Eastern Europe and of Russia, the areas in which Eastern Orthodoxy has flourished, has been limited, at best. Even Western Christian treatments of church history have concentrated virtually exclusively on the Western Christian heritage; few such volumes accord more than a passing glance at Eastern Christianity. Perhaps unintentionally, but nevertheless surely, we have long ignored—and, consequently, been ignorant of—that vast segment of Christendom which has continued from the Greek church fathers of antiquity to the present and is known as Orthodoxy. What occasioned this?

During the last six centuries, the West rose to world dominance, and our historical interests have focused on our culture, its background, and its accomplishments. By contrast to our Western experience, as of 1453, all but one of the Orthodox churches had fallen under the domination of the Ottoman Turkish Empire; for more than half a millennium they languished in this oppressive atmosphere, but they survived. Only the Russian Orthodox Church knew freedom during that time, but it was usually dominated by the tsars; beyond that, Russia was so exotic and unquestionably foreign to Western experience that understanding of its experience in any regard—including its religious commitment—was minimal. Beyond all this, for most of the last half of the twentieth century, with the Communist domination of Russia and Eastern Europe, the vast majority of worldwide Orthodoxy was captured behind the Iron Curtain. Given Soviet Communism's atheistic basis, the Orthodox churches faced intense hostility; given the Russian Communist control of information dissemination, that half-century proffered little opportunity to become acquainted with Orthodoxy. Thus, for several centuries, obstacles have cluttered the path toward familiarity with Orthodoxy. That, along with Western culture's longstanding and undeniable self-preoccupation, has conspired against Western Christians learning much about Eastern Christianity.

In the last few generations, though, the obstacles have been getting cleared away. The substantial emigration from various Eastern European countries and from Russia since the late 1800s offered a small window on the faith to which so many of these people were committed. This opening has been dramatically increased in the last few years: with the collapse of the Communist Bloc in 1989 and the Soviet Union in 1991, Orthodoxy entered upon a freedom unknown for several centuries. Since then, Western Christians have had more opportunity to become acquainted with this Eastern Christianity which has stood faithful to its ancient roots through centuries of dreary oppression and, more recently, fiendish persecution.

As some acquaintance has developed, Western Christians have often been struck by approaches and emphases in Eastern Orthodoxy which distinguish it from Western Christianity. The desire to understand these distinctives has spawned further interest in Eastern Christianity. This book has been written to respond to that interest in things Orthodox.

FOCUS: ORTHODOXY'S "DISTINCTIVES"

Even so, we Western Christians should recognize that in asking about the distinctiveness of Eastern Christianity, we are assuming and reflecting our Western Christian perspective. From the vantage point of an Eastern Christian, those "distinctives" are, simply, what Christianity is all about. Correlatively, that Eastern Christian could speak of distinctives of Western Christianity, and do so by pointing to items which we probably take for granted as essential to Christian faith and practice. Learning from each other requires openness and humility.

For us Western Christians, becoming acquainted with Eastern Orthodox distinctives can be enriching: it can stimulate a renewed appreciation of the depths and riches of the Christian faith, the Scriptures, doctrine and the joyful privilege of worshiping and serving God. As a Western Christian myself, I have experienced this. Over the last few years, I have also had the privilege of helping numerous Western Christians explore Eastern Orthodoxy; they too have found the experience rewarding. In this book, I seek to present some of those Orthodox distinctives in a way that we in the Christian West can understand and appreciate.

I hope that Orthodox readers will find this book helpful too. It may serve to remind them of the richness of their tradition by letting them see it anew through the eyes of a Western Christian who deeply appreciates their heritage. I trust that the presentation of Orthodox distinctives, against the backdrop of Western Christian patterns, will help Orthodox readers see how to relate their faith to that of

their Western Christian acquaintances (and thus how to communicate better with them), in addition to serving as a review of significant elements of their heritage of faith and practice.

Teaching at a small undergraduate university has helped prepare me for this venture: curricular necessities and budget constraints force professors at such institutions to teach more than just in the areas of expertise developed during their graduate training. Specifically, I have taught courses in the histories and cultures of ancient Greece and ancient Rome, the Middle Ages and the Reformation era in Western Europe, Byzantium, Eastern Europe, Eastern Orthodoxy and church history. Together, these have given me the opportunity to examine and compare cultures and perspectives as they developed in the West and in the lands where Eastern Orthodoxy has taken root, have enabled me to discern commonalities and differences in historical and doctrinal patterns, and have acquainted me with the scholarly divergences of interpretation which require caution.

In what follows, I have tried to survey the terrain fairly without running roughshod over either historical or doctrinal qualifications upon which someone might insist. Comparing the different cultural settings in the Greek-speaking and the Latin-speaking halves of the ancient Roman Empire has necessitated a broad sweep, as has comment on either "the Christian East" or "the Christian West" in subsequent historical periods. It has also been necessary to sketch out common patterns in Western Christianity's approaches to the faith, so as to set forth the different approaches found in Orthodoxy. Consequently, I have had to paint the picture, at times, with rather broad strokes, historically and doctrinally; the need for both brevity and general comparisons prohibited too much qualification. If we were examining Western Christian perspectives themselves, these presentations would require greater nuance, but my purpose has been to show basic patterns or similarities among Western Christian perspectives, for all their admitted diversity, as they have been discerned by the Orthodox or by Western Christian scholarship.

This book will not attempt to recount the long history of Eastern Orthodoxy, to present a complete exposition of Orthodox doctrine or to present a collection of significant utterances by Orthodox authors; all these can be found in other volumes currently available. The purpose of this volume is to introduce Western Christian readers to some of the distinctive perspectives and emphases of Eastern Orthodoxy in a way that facilitates understanding and appreciation. To achieve this, I have sometimes found it preferable to shape the treatment by categories familiar to Western Christian thought (as, e.g., with "The Accomplishment of Salvation" [chapter seven] and "The Application of Salvation" [chapter eight]); usu-

ally, though, the treatment follows categories common to Orthodox thought.

This book is intended to serve as a stimulus to Christian growth and development—but obviously in an ecumenical sense. I hope that reading this volume and reflecting on what it presents will be enriching to the piety and insight of Western Christians. With that, they should be drawn to a greater appreciation for brothers and sisters in the Eastern Christian tradition. If some of those Orthodox brothers and sisters also find this book helpful, I will count the labor expended in producing this work doubly blessed.

At the beginning of the third millennium, it may seem odd to devote attention to a segment of Christendom which traces its roots back to the earliest history of the Christian church and emphasizes its fidelity to that antiquity: after all, with the constant advertising brouhaha in the West about new and improved products, Christians too can become impatient with that which is longstanding. But we must remember that Christianity is, undeniably, a historical religion; the Christian faith is rooted in the soil of history. Into history God sent his Son to accomplish salvation—in this world, and in time as we mark it on calendars. He also promised to be with us throughout history, to its end (Mt 28:20), and to guide his church by the Holy Spirit (Jn 16:13). The path Orthodoxy has traversed over the centuries shows Christ's faithfulness to his promises and to our Eastern Christian brothers and sisters; considering what they have learned is a way to appreciate his work among them—and might even stimulate us to become more familiar with the history of Western Christianity than we often are. If this can help wean us from our cultural obsession with the allegedly "new and improved," it would also enable us better to live up to the apostolic summons not to be conformed to this present world (Rom 12:2); if we have ears to hear what the Spirit has said (Rev 3:13) to the Orthodox churches through their long history, we may ourselves find ways to live more faithfully in our own day. Recent history has shown the resilience and strength of Orthodoxy, which survived the worst that its atheistic Communist foes could do. Indeed, the survival of Eastern Orthodoxy through the past half-millennium shows that this portion of Christendom possesses considerable spiritual resources—resources from which Western Christians might well learn.

My approach in this book does not imply that I think all things Eastern Orthodox are as well as they might be. Respected and often outspoken Orthodox leaders recognize foibles, problems and areas that need to be vigorously addressed in their communions, whether in the émigré Orthodox churches in Western Europe and North America or those in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. It would be arrogance on the part of an Orthodox Christian to assume that noth-

ing could be improved within Orthodoxy. Equally, it would be hubris for Western Christians to act as if they had so well mastered the Christian faith and its practice that they could not sit at the feet of Eastern Christians and learn from them. On either side, that kind of arrogance is spawned by ignorance, cradled in pride and nurtured in a triumphalism that cannot rightly claim the name Christian.

This book should also not be taken to imply that the Christian East is only to be teacher. Indeed, there is much in Western Christianity that might be of benefit to Eastern Christianity. However, this book is intended to set forth some of the riches of Eastern Orthodoxy for Western Christians—specifically, for those who have already learned to appreciate insights of other Christians in the West and who are willing to open themselves to enrichment from the Eastern Orthodox tradition. I hope that through this book some light from the Christian East will fall on our pathway and help us see even better how to journey through this life toward the ultimate hope set before us.

1

Historical Perspectives

The distinctive emphases found within Christianity, both Eastern and Western, have developed over the course of several centuries. They are rooted in the different ways the gospel was appropriated in the Latin and the Greek cultures of the Roman Empire during the period of the ancient church. Subsequently, the particular distinctives of Eastern Orthodoxy were elaborated during the Byzantine era. In the trying circumstances faced by Eastern Christianity since the fall of Constantinople, these distinctives have not only been preserved and practiced, they have also received further elaboration. By tracing the history traversed by Orthodoxy in the following overview, with special focus on what has shaped its distinctive approaches and emphases, we will be in a better position to understand and appreciate those distinctives.

The Ancient Church: Unity and Diversity

The fifth book of the New Testament presents the story of the apostolic witness spreading outward from Jerusalem, into Judea, through Samaria, unto the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The book culminates with St. Paul preaching the gospel in Rome (Acts 28:23-31). Within a little more than three decades after the death and resurrection of Christ, the Christian message could be heard throughout the Roman Empire and in the capital itself. Even within the confines of Caesar's household (Phil 4:22), there were people who had responded with faith in Christ. "The ends of the earth" had been reached, with the proclamation of the gospel in the capital of the Roman Empire. Rather than marking the end of history, both of the church and of the present age—as some early Christians thought it would—this humble triumph of the spread of the gospel opened up a wide new history of the church within this age.

The path of the church would involve many tortuous turns and difficult struggles in the following 250 years, but remarkable—and, indeed, quite unexpected—

developments lay in store for it. By the early fourth century, the emperor himself, Constantine the Great, had embraced Christianity; before the end of the fourth century, under Theodosius the Great, Christianity became the official religion of the empire. It is scarcely surprising that enthused leaders of the church saw in all this the realization of the eschatological declaration "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" (Rev 11:15 RSV). Their determination to transform that earthly empire from within, so that it would become in reality what it was in promise, was a faithful response to the glorious opportunity afforded them.

Pursuing such a transformation would require the discerning application of all that Christ had commanded (Mt 28:20) to the manifold situations confronting the church throughout the empire. It would entail not only a careful listening to the deepest questions of the respective cultures that the Roman Empire had absorbed but also offering relevant responses that could be understood by the members of those cultures. Such an endeavor would not be a new venture for the church: it would be a broadening of what had been its practice since the church first began to spread.

When the Christian message originally moved out of the confines of Palestine, it entered regions of the ancient world that had not been molded by the experience of the Jewish people. As it did so, that Christian message encountered established cultures, which the early Christian church needed to understand if it was to bring the gospel with clarity into those cultures. More than that was needed, however; the church also had to find ways to communicate the gospel to the people whose thought patterns, attitudes and approaches to life had been shaped by those cultures.

Sometimes, communicating the gospel faithfully might require direct challenge to prevailing thought patterns and the endeavor to replace them with Christian alternatives. At other times, it might involve an appreciation of attitudes that could be transformed from within to serve the glory of Christ. St. Paul indicates that the goal of his ministry was to "take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor 10:5). There is nothing in that passage to suggest that this was a determination unique to him; indeed, it seems evident that he saw no other option, whether for other apostles and leaders of the church or for any of its members.

Working thus within various cultural settings did not, however, lead to doctrinal division within the church. To the contrary, the early church gloried in the unity which marked its faith and practice in whatever tongue, tribe, people or nation (Rev 7:9) it was found: there was "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph 4:5). This was true not only during the lifetime of the apostles but in the ensuing

centuries as well. To the apostolic fathers of the late first and the second centuries, the church's continuity in the apostolic message indicated both the Lord's faithfulness to his promises to be with it to the end of the age (Mt 28:20) and to guide it into all truth (Jn 16:13), and also the church's faithfulness in preserving and proclaiming what he had imparted to it.[1] According to the church fathers of the late second and the third centuries, the continuing unity in teaching and practice to be found throughout the church, in whatever region of the world it had taken root, testified to the presence and leading of the Holy Spirit within it. That unity in the apostolic message was, in their understanding, both gift and task, and they sought strenuously to remain within the apostolic teaching and practice.[2]

However, this unity did not issue into a bland sameness or preclude divergences of approach on various matters. The very use of different languages—Greek in the eastern half of the Roman Empire and Latin in the West—inevitably involved certain differences. Moreover, the Latin and the Hellenistic worlds were themselves different in several regards. In relating with relevance to the respective cultures in which the church took root, attitudes and approaches which became commonplace in ecclesiastical life in one culture would not necessarily be found in churches in the other. Just as absorption of people groups into the Roman Empire had not meant the eradication of the various subject peoples' cultures, likewise as the church subsequently spread into those cultures, the Christian message did not eradicate them as intrinsically evil. In this way, the Christian church took on various shades of emphasis, depending on where it was found within the ancient world; however, it did not thereby lose its unity in faith and practice. This assured the leaders of the church that, for all the differences in particulars which might be noted, they were nonetheless still one.

We need to keep this ecclesiastical pattern of acculturation in mind in order to appreciate what took place in the early church in general, and the roots of Eastern Christianity's distinctiveness in particular. To understand this, it may be helpful to remind readers of what they have probably been taught about the roots of Western civilization.

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[1]These emphases appear in St. Clement of Rome's *Letter of the Romans to the Corinthians* 42:1-2 and 44:2; in St. Polycarp's *Letter to the Philippians* 3:2 and 7:2; and in St. Ignatius of Antioch's *Letter to the Ephesians* 3:2, as well as in his *Letter to the Smyrneans* 1:2 and 8:2.

[2]This perspective is pervasive among the leaders of the church during this period. It is especially prominent in the works of three of the most significant of them: see the arguments in St. Irenaeus of Lyons *Against Heresies* 1.10.2; 3.3.1-2; 3.4.1-2; 4.20.1; 5.20.2; Tertullian *Prescriptions Against Heretics,* chaps. 6, 9, 12 and 13 (with special stress in chaps. 20, 28, 32); and St. Cyprian *On the Unity of the Catholic Church,* chaps. 5 and 23.

Textbook treatments of the ancient period of Western civilization commonly emphasize the foundational contributions of Greece and of Rome, the two great civilizations that shaped the world into which the Christian message was first proclaimed. The great gifts of ancient Greece to Western civilization were democracy, on the one hand, and the stress on human reason, on the other. Rome's chief bequests lay in other fields. For one, its emphasis on law has profoundly molded Western attitudes toward law, nation and justice. For another, Rome was wise enough to adopt the insights and practices of those nations it conquered, rather than to eradicate them or reject and then reinvent analogues to them; however, it first adapted them to mesh with its own distinctive Roman approaches. This Roman orientation implanted deeply within the Western psyche a concern to understand how something holds together, how it works and how it affects (or would affect) the system already in place. These Greek and Roman emphases had already molded the cultures into which Christianity first spread. To appreciate that influence, however, we need to consider how the ancient Greek contribution itself had been reshaped by the time the Christian message began to be heard.

The culture of ancient Greece, which spawned democracy and the emphasis on reason, flourished from the sixth through the fourth centuries B.C. As that culture was subsequently spread throughout the world in the wake of the conquests of Alexander the Great, that *Hellenic* culture was transformed into *Hellenistic* culture. Thus modified, Greek influence permeated the leading strata of the entire ancient Near Eastern world well before Rome swallowed up the region into its empire.

Alexander saw himself as benefactor to the known world in imparting the benefits of Hellenic culture to it. As that culture permeated the ancient Near East, it was assimilated and adapted to the quite different cultural milieus into which it entered: it became *Hellenistic* culture which, though rooted in ancient Greece, was nonetheless something distinct from it. Hellenic culture had flourished in the close confines of the Greek *polis* ("city-state"); Hellenistic culture reigned within the much more impersonal structures of the large kingdoms that developed out of Alexander's empire.

Not surprisingly, Hellenic experimentation with democracy passed from the scene in the Hellenistic age. However, the emphasis on reason survived, even though it was transformed. In the Hellenistic period, philosophers continued to engage in searching theoretical speculation, but they manifested considerably less confidence than their Hellenic predecessors that human reason could lead to the embrace of ultimate truth. With their forebears in the glory days of ancient Athens, the Hellenistic thinkers still used their reasoning capacities to discourse on

beauty, goodness, justice and their noumenal kin; even more, those philosophers reflected on fate, tragedy and the host of related phenomenal experiences which had been so graphically portrayed by the playwrights of the Hellenic era and were always relevant to the human condition. In seeking to relate such dissimilar concerns in a largely impersonal cosmopolis, these Hellenistic philosophers placed limitations on what bare reason might hope to attain; they made room for a "Beyond" which even reason could not reach. This was the intellectual culture in the eastern half of the Roman Empire into which the Christian message entered and to which it sought to speak.

In the western half of that empire, the situation was quite different. The Roman world had not been profoundly affected by Hellenistic attitudes. It had long since developed its own approach to life, culture, government and mutual responsibility before encountering the cultural results of Alexander's conquests. Where the Hellenistic emphasis on reason had remained primarily the province of the cultural elite in the ancient Near East, the Roman emphasis on practicality and adaptability could be assimilated by virtually anyone in society; consequently, it could and did seep much more deeply into the habits of thought of the common people. Furthermore, the emphasis on law, for all the need it undeniably had of specialist practitioners, could and did touch on the lives of the average Roman. The more ethereal and intellectually reflective stance of the leading cadres of Hellenistic culture was not particularly attractive to Roman society.

The stark difference in the respective cultures is obvious in the following contrast. Hellenistic culture had produced many brilliant philosophers who explored profoundly what reason could (and could not) offer; even so, during its more than millennial existence, Rome produced no great philosophers. There was, of course, no lack of great minds among the Romans; however, the best and brightest of Rome's gifted pursued law rather than philosophy. Even those who, like Cicero and Seneca, appear to have been philosophically attuned were really interested in questions of ethics—that is, of the *practical application* of thought to life; this was a distinctively Roman approach to and adaptation of the life of the intellect.

As the Christian message spread into these divergent cultures, it came to people whose attitudes and concerns had been shaped by those cultures. These people had the same longings, needs and ultimate concerns as any human would, but the particular ways in which they thought, acted and lived, and the questions with which they wrestled, were inevitably shaped by and inextricably bound up with the cultures in which they had grown up.

Thus, contextualization was not a merely theoretical issue but the need of the

hour for the fledgling church. Without departing from the teaching of Christ and the apostles, the church nevertheless, in bringing the gospel relevantly to each of these great cultures, spoke it into those cultures in ways that their people could understand. Those who heard the gospel and responded in faith also incorporated it in terms of the concerns they already knew and the questions with which they traditionally wrestled. Because of this, from early in the church's existence, different emphases and stresses in teaching and preaching emerged in the two halves of the Roman Empire. These distinguishable emphases did not contradict each other, but they were nevertheless different. Each was a relevant response to the distinct culture into which the gospel had come. A consideration of two historic contrasts in Christian emphasis, as these arose within the two cultures, may elucidate the general pattern of these differences.

In the first place, during the early third century a significant difference arose between Christian leaders in the two halves of the empire as to how best to present the claims of Christianity. In the eastern part, in the intellectual center of Alexandria, Clement of Alexandria and his student Origen sought to demonstrate that Christianity was the culmination of the best that Hellenic and Hellenistic thought had produced. They sought points of similarity and contact between the Christian faith and the leading philosophical systems produced by their day[3]—especially Platonism.[4]

By contrast, in the Latin West, Tertullian responded with the trenchant challenge, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" He rejected the Alexandrian attitude, one consonant with the Hellenistic intellectual culture to which Clement and Origen sought to bear witness. In Tertullian's estimation, Greek patterns of

[3]The results of their attempts would be challenged by subsequent Greek church fathers who, while they did not repudiate the project of Clement and Origen, sought to achieve it in a manner that precluded the assimilation of the Christian faith to the pagan influences of Greek and Hellenistic intellectual culture—the pattern which these later Greek church fathers discerned in the approach of Clement and Origen; cf. the treatment below, chap. 2, pp. 52-55.

[4]"Platonism" had become the catchall designation for philosophical thought in the Greek-speaking world long before Origen's time. The package of thought was not a straightforward continuation of Plato's teaching, however; it included many other elements that had commended themselves to philosophers since Plato's time. It has become common to refer to the "Platonism" that Origen and subsequent Christian leaders interacted with as "Neo-Platonism." This is anachronistic, however, for Origen. The philosopher who developed the coherent philosophical position subsequently known as Neo-Platonism was Plotinus, a contemporary of Origen. Plotinus's presentation of philosophy (which he called "Platonism") so quickly commended itself to philosophers of his time and subsequently that one can use the designation as the description for philosophical thought in ancient civilization in the generation immediately after Origen (d. 254). Consequently, most of the time when ancient philosophical thought is mentioned in our presentation from this point onward, it will be appropriate to denominate it "Neo-Platonism."