

# ***The Orthodox Study Bible and Orthodox Identity in North America***

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Reflecting on the publication of yet another “study Bible,” specialized for a niche market, evangelical scholar Timothy P. Weber noted that

No activities are more typically evangelical than strategizing for evangelism and putting the Bible into the hands of lay people – and no activities have more potential for disturbing established hierarchies. In the history of American religion, evangelism – especially the kind that works – has tended to challenge traditional structures and the theologies behind them. Likewise, putting the Bible into the hands of common people – especially those who like to read it on their own – has sometimes had revolutionary and unintended consequences. Bible-reading by lay people, some creedal Churches have learned to their cost, can cause more trouble than it is worth. Furthermore, ethnic Churches that try to evangelize the broader American culture often end up being Americanized themselves.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Timothy P. Weber, “Looking for Home: Evangelical Orthodoxy and the Search for the Original Church,” in Bradley Nassif, ed., *New Perspective in Historical Theology: Essays in Honour of John Meyendorff* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1996) pp. 95-124.

Was Weber describing the latest publishing efforts of an evangelical mega-church or campus ministry? No. Rather, he was referring to the *Orthodox Study Bible*, a volume produced by an ecclesiastical structure once shrouded in mystery, now seeking to open up the riches of its Tradition to a broader audience.

Over the past generation, several significant cultural shifts have changed the face of the Orthodox Christian community in North America. Since its inception in the new world more than two hundred years ago, the Orthodox faith has been a richly variegated mosaic composed not only of Slavic and Mediterranean immigrant enclaves, but also of converts incorporated into its communities, customs, and liturgical worship. Prior to the 1980s, such shifts in religious affiliation were sporadic to say the least, existing mainly as a sort of curiosity on the fringes of North American religious culture. In 1987, however, after a decade-long journey of study, an affiliation of seventeen evangelical congregations with about two thousand people was received into the historically Syrian & Lebanese Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese. This story was then recounted widely in the press, and in detail in Fr. Peter Gillquist's book *Becoming Orthodox: A Journey to the Ancient Christian Faith*.<sup>2</sup> At the charge of Metropolitan Philip Saliba, the head of the Antiochian Archdiocese, this new group was encouraged to maintain its evangelical fervour, and to "bring America to Orthodoxy," just as their spiritual ancestors had brought Orthodoxy to American shores. The newly formed Antiochian Evangelical Orthodox Mission (AEOM), as the group was dubbed, began work almost immediately on – what else – a speciality Bible.

One of the most significant accomplishments coming out of this influx of neophyte Orthodox

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox: A Journey to the Ancient Christian Faith*. (Ben Lomond, CA.: Conciliar Press, 1992, revised edition).

is the *Orthodox Study Bible: New Testament and Psalms*, which was published in 1993. The *Study Bible's* purpose is obvious: to encourage Bible study among the Orthodox and to demonstrate that Orthodoxy is rooted in biblical teaching. Thus the notes at the bottom of each page often quote from Orthodox sources or explain how the text relates to Orthodox teaching or practice. Following the basic format of other evangelical study Bibles (e.g., the *Scotfield Reference Bible* and the *Ryrie Study Bible*), the *Orthodox Study Bible* also includes brief introductions and outlines for each biblical book, cross references, a concordance, a glossary, a harmony of the Gospels, articles on various themes, a lectionary, a collection of morning and evening prayers, maps, and numerous icons to illustrate the text. Peter Gillquist served as project director, and first drafts of the textual notes were prepared by people at the AEOM's St. Athanasius Academy. Their work was then reviewed by other Orthodox biblical scholars and hierarchs. In its first year, the *Orthodox Study Bible* sold 75, 000 copies and is the first Bible of its kind produced by and for the Orthodox in America.<sup>3</sup>

The sales statistics show that the *Orthodox Study Bible* was, on the whole, quite well received, not only in parishes with considerable "convert" populations, but also in the traditionally ethnic Churches. The positive reception, however, was not universal. Critique of the *Study Bible* tended to focus on either its lack of academic veracity or the apparent shallowness of its "Orthodoxy." The very production of a specialty Bible for a niche community typifies the market-savvy of contemporary evangelicalism. This begs the question: does the *Orthodox Study Bible* represent a sort of 'colonization' of the Orthodox Church with the methodologies of North American evangelicalism, as some critics have suggested? Or, to the contrary, does the *Orthodox Study Bible* project, with its ongoing research and publication aims, embody an increasingly indigenous and 'organic' North American Orthodoxy?

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<sup>3</sup> Weber, p. 115.

We can address this twofold question adequately only by attempting to understand the role of Scripture historically within the Orthodox Tradition, and then by addressing the place of the Bible within the life of the Orthodox Church in North America today. The reality is that Orthodoxy is significantly less well known here than probably all other Christian traditions, both Catholic and Protestant. The tumults of the twentieth century virtually guaranteed Orthodoxy's isolation from the mainstream radar screen of "public religion" in both the United States and Canada. By examining both the theological place of the Bible within Orthodoxy, as well as the Orthodox Church's situation within the North American religious milieu, we can set the *Orthodox Study Bible* in context, and more fully appreciate its meaning.

The role of Scripture in the life of the Orthodox Church is often assumed to be one of balancing competing elements, most often seen as Scripture *and* tradition. Such a dichotomy; however, is foreign to Orthodoxy itself, which sees no sharp distinction between these two essential agents in the life of the faith. Rather, Scripture is understood to be an essential and pre-eminent facet of the comprehensive Holy Tradition. This understanding of Tradition was perhaps best described in the twentieth century by Father Georges Florovsky as:

the *paradosis*, the handing down of what God chose to disclose and communicate to men. It is not a particular "source" of truth or doctrine. Revelation is adequately recorded in Scripture. But Scripture is, as it were, "stored" or "deposited" in the Church. On the other hand, tradition is equated with the mind and continuous memory of the Church. And in this sense it is the guiding principle and criterion of scriptural interpretation. Accordingly, tradition does not and cannot add anything to Scripture, but only elicits what is contained in Holy Writ and puts it in the right perspective. The Scriptures "belong" to the Church, are committed to her and not to individual believers. A faithful guide is required for true exegesis. The Church catholic is that guide. Or in other words, Scripture is

given and preserved in tradition. Tradition and Scripture are inseparable.<sup>4</sup>

Certain general characteristics, therefore, can be outlined that sketch the way that Orthodox Christians in North America have and have not typically engaged or experienced the Bible. Traditionally Orthodox Christians experience the Scriptures not so much through private reading and study, but *visually, through tactile sense, orally, and aurally* through the ritual, Biblical readings and hymnody that compose Orthodox liturgical worship. Let me explain: the richly ornamented Gospel Book lies or stands alone as the only text on the altar during the Divine Liturgy, and is carried and venerated with great reverence by the faithful before it is read, at the midpoint of the service.

While the Fathers of the Church encouraged lay study of the Scriptures, rarely has it shifted the main emphasis on communal reading in the context of worship. Such study, therefore, has almost always gone hand in glove, in Orthodox circles, with a comprehensive approach to liturgical theology and the sacramental nature of the Church. It was not only for reasons of pre-modern illiteracy or the scarcity or cost of printed Bibles that Orthodox parishes have *not* been typified by a focus on Bible 'study.' Rather, it is the fact that for centuries, the services have been saturated with the language of the Scriptures, breeding a certain kind of innate familiarity with at least major portions of the Gospels and the Epistles.

Those who attended more services than just the Sunday Divine Liturgy would also hear annually major portions from the Old Testament – if in a Hellenic setting, straight from the pages of the Septuagint. While some well-educated and diligent parish priests made great efforts to teach the Scriptures with some degree of intention, until recent decades it probably would have been the exception to the

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<sup>4</sup> Georges Florovsky, *Scripture and Tradition: An Orthodox Point of View* in *Collected Works*, vol. 1, *Bible, Church, Tradition*, by Florovsky, Georges (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1972-79).

rule to have either any such form of Biblical instruction or, for that matter, to have had an educated priest in the first place. With the growth of ATS-accredited graduate-level Orthodox seminaries in North America, this is of course changing dramatically.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the advent of a more resourceful clergy will not change the fact that Scripture in Orthodoxy is intrinsically doxological and that Biblical formation will continue to be understood as a symbiosis with both the life of prayer and also that of *philia* and *diakonia*. If you look at the facts, it has always been more by osmosis than chapter-and-verse examination that the Orthodox traditionally acquired their Biblical literacy.

Another mode of Biblical enculturation typical to Orthodoxy in its historic settings, which is not yet deeply established in North America (and undoubtedly perceived by most Orthodox to be sorely lacking), is in the personal encounter with monasticism. In the Christian East, monastic life has always been at the heart of Church life, and has had significant impact on patterns of personal piety. Derwas Chitty, in his classic book *The Desert a City*, recounts how thousands would flock to encounter the spiritual fathers and mothers who sought to live as hermits in the Egyptian and Palestinian wilderness.<sup>6</sup> But they could not live as hermits long, always being called out for instruction and for the wisdom gained in stillness, *hesychia*. This practice has not abated, and even today it is common for pious Orthodox Christians to make journeys on occasion to the monastery to encounter a spiritual person, a spiritual father or mother, who can speak words of divine meaning into their lives. Not unlike hearing the Gospel in the Liturgy of the Church, these people, steeped in the Tradition of the faith, act as a sort of "living Bible" (pardon the equivocation with the popular 1970s un-regimented dynamic equivalent, *The Living Bible*), speaking the Scriptural word to that person, in keeping with the mind of the Church,

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<sup>5</sup> ATS – the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada.

<sup>6</sup> Derwas J. Chitty, *The Desert a City: Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism Under the Christian Empire* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977).

for the present moment. While a few monastic communities have been rooted on North American soil for a century – notably St. Tikhon’s Monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania – they are few, small, and very far between. There is the common attitude in many Orthodox circles that nothing can take the place of this personal and countercultural witness that is to be found among monks and nuns. To such believers as these, an attractive, user-friendly, and professionally produced *Study Bible* may even appear at first as something rather foreign to the whole Orthodox mindset, however appreciated it might be as a sort of helpful “supplement.”

The factors just described raise the matter of Orthodox identity. Despite its self-understanding in theological terms as “one,” Orthodox Christianity has never been monolithic. The principle of collegiality amongst the hierarchy of the Church, intrinsic to the very basis of its ecclesiology is deeply rooted. Indeed, this appreciation of acceptable local variation is exemplified by the Russian term *sobornost*, conveying a sense of the mutuality inherent in Orthodoxy’s conception of being the Church. Nevertheless, the specific identity of Orthodoxy in North America – embodied in its liturgical life and accompanying folkways – remains dynamic. The relationship of theological consciousness to national consciousness remains significant. In this light, an easy binary can be set up, those Orthodox who cherish and wish to sustain the national descriptors prefacing “Orthodox Church” on the sign out front (along with its accompanying associations), and those who do not. Of course, such a simple breakdown fails to take a robust view of the enculturation of dogma, a point of great interest in emerging Orthodox thought, particularly that of Fr. Michael Oleksa in reflecting on the Church’s experience amongst the First Nations of Alaska. How has Orthodoxy engaged America?

The chaos of Orthodoxy in North America in the twentieth century, largely a result of the Russian Revolution and civil war, cannot be overestimated in comprehending how Orthodoxy people and

communities see themselves.<sup>7</sup> From the foundation of the Orthodox faith by missionaries to Alaska in 1794, through until the 1920s, all Orthodox in North America, regardless of ethnic background, looked to the Russian Bishop for leadership and oversight. Russians, Greeks, Syrians, Serbians, Albanians all were administratively one as the Church lived out its life. It was for good reason that the Church was constantly referred to as “the Mission,” for prior to the time of the Revolution it existed not in segregated nationalist enclaves, but embraced its evangelical calling. For instance, the Church used English in its liturgical services from a very early period. After the Revolution; however, funding abruptly ceased and ecclesiastical communication between the Mother Church in Russia and the pan-ethnic daughter in America became pressurized and constrained. Of course, this is an incredible heated and contested history.

It was in this period that, in light of the blow dealt to the Russian Orthodox Church administration, the previously united Orthodox groups in North America began to develop their own jurisdictions based on nationality.<sup>8</sup> To some extent national identity gained privilege over dogma during this era, from about 1925 to approximately 1970. While theologically and sacramentally the Orthodox Church preserved its integrity, soon the major Orthodox groupings that we know today were established. Within the Russian tradition, tremendous pressures created by the policies of the Soviet government actually intensified the parochialism of the parishes on the ground here. In places like New York City, local parishes created lay organizations that ‘purchased’ their church buildings as assets, in order to prevent them from being seized by the Soviet state. Schisms set in, separating communities from one another, and from the rest of the Church, each faction claiming to be the truly ‘Orthodox’ one. The “Red” scare of 1950s and Senator Joe McCarthy did not make matters easier for

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<sup>7</sup> Constance J. Tarasar, General Editor, *Orthodox America 1794-1976: Development of the Orthodox Church in America* (Syossett, NY: The Orthodox Church in America Department of History and Archives, 1975), pp. 173-181.

<sup>8</sup> Tarasar, pp. 183-201.

anyone claiming the name "Russian." Over time a certain amount of defensiveness and protectionism set in, exacerbated by a kind of xenophobia. Some Orthodox parishes coped by attempting to fit in better with the Protestant mainstream, using organs and installing pews. Others retreated into a sort of simulacrum of devotion, attempting to recreate a sort of utopian experience of the faith as they had known it in the old country, with strict adherence to the rubrics, and nary a word of English. For decades, large portions of the once outward-looking "Mission," became preoccupied with mere survival. As a result, many Orthodox parishes in a sense developed a sort of amnesia, forgetting who they really were.

Into this bruised ecclesial world, several decades on, came the evangelical Orthodox. They had learned their faith largely from books, and later, well into their search for the New Testament Church, received assistance from Fr. Alexander Schmemmann of St. Vladimir's Seminary. The acute difficulties of the 1920s and 30s had long-since faded, and a more settled life had developed amongst the various Orthodox groups in North America. The ethnic jurisdictions had established a workable relationship amongst their various bishops, exemplified by the founding of the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in America (SCOBA) in 1960. By the late 1960s there had developed a greater openness once again to the use of English as a liturgical language, and in 1970 the Orthodox Church in America was granted autocephalous status by the Patriarchate of Moscow, finally granting "sister" status to its "daughter" mission in America. Dozens of new mission parishes were established in the subsequent decades, many of them using mainly English as a liturgical language, injecting new life into what had become in some places a sea of malaise. Much talk has occurred about normalizing the canonical situation in North America, the possible reunification of all of the ethnic jurisdictions into one local Orthodox Church for this continent, and yet, 35 years later not much progress has been made.

The development of an organic Orthodox Church in North America is already centuries in process and proves a fascinating study in the enculturation of religious belief and practice. Looking back a thousand years, we can note the ways in which the Orthodox faith spread northward from its Mediterranean base with the conversion of the Slavs, taking on its own indigenous forms over time. Similarly with the Russian mission to Alaska in 1794, the Yupiq and Aleut peoples readily accepted the Christian Gospel, in the process 'baptizing' much within their traditional culture, including song and dance, the potlatch, and other aspects of their ritual life. It helped of course that missionaries like Bishop Innocent were desirous to translate the Scriptures into the Native languages, as exemplified by his translation of the Gospel of Matthew into the Tlingit tongue.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, this is a tremendous example of Lamin Sanneh's hypothesis that Scripture translation is one of the key factors in the preservation of indigenous languages.<sup>10</sup>

The question can be raised; however, as to how the Orthodox faith will address and relate to other Christian traditions present in North America, and the *Orthodox Study Bible* posed a new question. How will Orthodoxy respond to the culture of North American evangelicalism? Prior to the reception of the seventeen "Evangelical Orthodox" congregations in 1987, relatively few conservative Protestants had made this transition, and there had been little interaction between Orthodox and evangelicals. In the first half of the twentieth century, it must be remembered, interaction even between various Protestant denominations was much more limited than it is in today's increasingly 'post-denominational' environment. The cultural and language factors circumscribing most Orthodox parishes prior to

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<sup>9</sup> Paul D. Garrett, *Saint Innocent: Apostle to America* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979).

<sup>10</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books) 1989. See also Paul Russ Satari, "'Translatibility' in the Missional Approach of Lamin Sanneh," in George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder, eds., *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 270-284.

the 1970s usually dictated that if a person wanted to embrace the Orthodox faith, in most cases they would have to take upon themselves the task of acquiring another language as well. For individuals, this not only meant learning Russian or Greek, but also 'formation' by the religious "languages," which, as generational and immigration studies have shown, takes time.

Evangelicals coming to Orthodoxy today have twenty centuries of Tradition to learn and absorb, a process that cannot easily or profitably be rushed. The simple fact that there has never before been a specialized study Bible for Orthodox might baffle an evangelical raised on *The Student Bible* or the young adult version of Eugene Peterson's *The Message*. The fact that that an Orthodox parish may never have had a "Bible Study" might be confusing to those unfamiliar with the Scripture quotient in the liturgical services. Yet, it is strangely converts who have had the most difficulty with the *Orthodox Study Bible*. Perhaps they do not want their new spiritual home to become tainted with the "battle for the Bible" from whence they came. On the other hand, many Orthodox themselves fail to comprehend the diversity and subtlety within contemporary Protestantism. They may not realize that Methodism and other Wesleyan traditions have in some ways more in common with their theology than with, for instance, classical Presbyterian or Reformed doctrine. There is an awareness deficit on both sides.

While it is probably too early for a comprehensive 'reception history' of the *Orthodox Study Bible*, it is fair to say that the response to it has been mixed. From a Bible sales standpoint, it has been quite successful, turning a rather pretty profit for Thomas Nelson. For a broad range of parishes in the United States and Canada, its publication was cause for celebration, and greatly welcomed by clergy and laity as a pastoral, educational, and spiritual resource. Most significantly, it was blessed for publication by all the Bishops of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in America (SCOBA). Some others; however, as alluded to previously, did not

greet the *Orthodox Study Bible* so charitably. It was considered by more modest critics to be premature, and by its more vehement detractors – as academically untenable and barely ‘Orthodox’ at all.

In the fourteen years since its initial release, the *Orthodox Study Bible* has, on the whole, been warmly received by most of the Orthodox jurisdictions in North America, including the three largest: the Greek Archdiocese, the Antiochian (with which many of the project participants are affiliated), and also the Orthodox Church in America. It is widely used for personal Bible reading, and also in parish Scripture studies. On an anecdotal level, it is a popular gift for those entering the Church through either baptism or chrismation, the rite of entrance common to those already-baptised in other Christian traditions. As well, individual clergy and parishes have been known to purchase the book in case lots from the publisher for local distribution. Clearly, for many the *Orthodox Study Bible* has met an important need for Biblical study material with a specifically Orthodox focus.

The generally warm reception the *Orthodox Study Bible* has received in the United States and Canada, did not deter its academic and doctrinal critics. Intriguingly, the most well known among them has been a British classicist, and himself a convert to Orthodoxy, for many years already a monk and esteemed translator of liturgical texts, the Archimandrite Ephrem Lash. As reviews editor of *Sourozh*, the publication of the Diocese of the Moscow Patriarchate in Britain, he dedicated much of the review space in the November 1993 edition to a review of *Orthodox Study Bible*, and he didn’t mince words:

...it must be clearly stated from the outset that the whole feel of this volume is wrong. It feels far too much like a piece of evangelical propaganda decked out in the trappings of Orthodoxy, like an eighteenth century New England chapel or meeting house with a golden onion dome stuck over the pediment of the porch.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Archimandrite Ephrem Lash, Book Review: *The Orthodox Study Bible*, in *Sourozh* 54 (November 1993).

Archimandrite Ephrem's indictment of the volume begins with its choice of the New King James Version, especially highlighting the unorthodox use of this translation for the Psalms. He points out numerous exegetical difficulties inherent in the New King James Version, particularly from an Orthodox perspective. Finally, he draws attention to inconsistencies in the study guide that accompanies the text. It must be said, however, that Archimandrite Ephrem particularly dislikes the tone, which he argues strongly has more an evangelical than an Orthodox character. These points, coming from not only an expert in the translation of Koine and Byzantine Greek texts, but also an Orthodox monk, must be given their due.

The New King James Version (NKJV) portion of the New Testament and Psalms was used untouched for the *Orthodox Study Bible*. The editorial committee explains that the underlying Greek text used by the translators of the Authorized Version of 1611 is more closely connected to the Byzantine text of the New Testament commonly used in the Orthodox Church. This being true, at many other significant points the NKJV, following its venerable parent, accords even closer yet with the Latin Vulgate. Archimandrite Ephrem points out how the *Orthodox Study Bible* reads at Luke 23:42:

'Remember me when you come into your Kingdom.' This prayer, we are told in a note, 'is highlighted in the hymns and worship of the Orthodox Church.' It isn't, because the Church's Gospel and all the liturgical texts derived from it in both Greek and Slavonic have 'in your Kingdom,' a reference to the Second Coming of Christ in his kingly power, as described in Matthew 25:31-46.<sup>12</sup>

One might consider this an overly scrupulous critique, since several other translations of this passage for use in the Beatitudes, sung weekly as the Third Antiphon of the Divine Liturgy, use "into" as well. However, it is not the only such observation. Indeed the case can

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<sup>12</sup> Lash.

be made that there are numerous and legitimate concerns, from an Orthodox exegetical perspective, with various translation choices in the NKJV. Besides this, there are further considerations to be taken into account.

It was not merely for exegetical reasons or for decisions of the NKJV's poetic suitability for liturgical reading that it was selected for use in the *Orthodox Study Bible*. To begin with, Thomas Nelson is the sole owner with full proprietary rights to the New King James Version. Thomas Nelson was the initial publisher of the New King James Version of the New Testament in 1979, after the original instigation of the project by Baptist minister Arthur Farnstad in 1975. The whole NKJV Bible was released in 1982, and has been published by Thomas Nelson continuously since then. By the time of his reception into and ordination in the Orthodox Church, along with the other leaders of the Antiochian Evangelical Orthodox Mission, Fr. Peter Gillquist, the Project Director for the *Orthodox Study Bible*, had worked as an editor for Thomas Nelson for almost twenty years. He was well aware of the concrete realities of producing a successful, niche-market speciality Bible, a task quite distinct from producing a new translation of the Scriptures. Acquiring the rights to use another, perhaps more acceptable, translation – if one could be found – would likely have been prohibitively expensive for the *Orthodox Study Bible* editors and their constituency, since there would be no financial benefit for them whatsoever in producing the volume. On the other hand, with a favourable relationship between Thomas Nelson and Fr. Gillquist, one of their most seasoned editors, the use of the NKJV no doubt fell right into place as being the most suitable, and available, at the time.

Perhaps there is yet another reason for the controversial choice of the NKJV. Many of the editors of the *Orthodox Study Bible*, now priests, were formerly Southern Baptists, Pentecostals, Lutherans, and Presbyterians. Many of them also now had a vested interest in their friends, families, and networks becoming interested in the Orthodox faith and perhaps making the same shift from evangelical

Protestantism to the East. To use a more commonly accepted academic translation, such as the Revised Standard Version commonly used by English-speaking Orthodox parishes in North America and Britain, could have perhaps alienated more conservative, if not fundamentalist Protestants, born and bred on the KJV. While this is only speculation, it would certainly jive with Metropolitan Philip Saliba's exhortation for this group to not "... lose their identity as an evangelical missionary group."<sup>13</sup>

Continuing on from Archimandrite Ephrem's censure of the *Orthodox Study Bible's* use of the NKJV is the fact that this suspect translation is also used for the Psalms. This raises the matter of the Orthodox Church's consistent use of the Septuagint as opposed to the Masoretic Hebrew Text for the Old Testament. The reasons for this are numerous, but they primarily centre on the fact that it was the Greek Septuagint that was, most likely, the Scripture of the Apostles, and in particular the writers of the New Testament. It also sustains the "longer canon" of the Old Testament, including the so-called "Deuterocanonical" books. In addition, the Psalter has had tremendous influence on the liturgical hymns of the Church, and itself forms an essential and intrinsic part of the weekly cycle of prayer. The Psalter is divided into twenty *kathismata* (i.e., "sitting down" parts), which are prayed over the course of seven days, with three *kathismata* being read each day, the first two at Matins and the third at Vespers. None of this material, while available in English in some of the most widely available liturgical books, made it into the *Orthodox Study Bible*. Furthermore, the traditional Greek titles attached to each Psalm in the LXX are nowhere to be found in the *Orthodox Study Bible* version of the Psalms. All this, to Archimandrite Ephrem, is inexcusable. He queries: "Considering the number of names that occupy most of the title page [of the *Orthodox Study Bible*], not to mention the numerous

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<sup>13</sup> Weber, p. 88.

others listed in the introduction, it should have been possible between them to produce a translation of the Psalms."<sup>14</sup>

A final category of pointed comments deals with the content of the study notes themselves. Archimandrite Ephrem points out numerous "curiosities," which betray a less than thorough knowledge of the liturgical use of the Scripture within the Orthodox Church, including inaccuracies and omissions in the lectionary included in the *Orthodox Study Bible*. Here it must be admitted that the lectionary tradition of the Christian East is vast and rather more complicated than the three-year Revised Common Lectionary now widely used in the West. He notes: "Why, for example, are we informed that the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost is the Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the First Six Ecumenical Councils and that it occurs between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of July, when in most years it does not?"<sup>15</sup> Other apparent flubs include

some surprising statements, such as 'spontaneity was never the practice in the ancient Church,'(!) when it is well known that in the early centuries the Eucharistic Prayer was improvised by the bishop. That Christian worship had 'a basic structure or shape' does not of itself exclude spontaneity.<sup>16</sup>

Many notes he finds to be jejune in the extreme, while in some places he finds a few of the longer notes to be "extremely valuable," such as that on the Transfiguration.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, he points out that the Evening and Morning Prayers contain no reference whatsoever to the *Theotokos*, the Mother of God, and that she is referred to simply as "Mary" in one of the longer notes.<sup>18</sup> This further adds to the evangelical Protestant patina of the *Orthodox Study Bible*, at least in Archimandrite Ephrem's assessment. Whatever one makes of this

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<sup>14</sup> Lash.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

interpretation of the volume's "Orthodoxy," it seems almost incredible that such a highly regarded group of scholars listed as the "Overview Committee" would have overlooked some of these errors in the notes. One can only assume that not all of the committee reviewed all of the notes, and that can only be attributed to a certain kind of naiveté. In short, Archimandrite Ephrem's conclusion is that

There is a profound sense in which it is true to say that Orthodoxy takes centuries to acquire. This book is the product of people who, with the very best of intentions, are going too fast too soon.<sup>19</sup>

It should be recognized that in 1993, the originators of the *Orthodox Study Bible* were all fairly recent evangelical converts to the Orthodox faith, but perhaps more importantly, almost all were also newly ordained parish clergy. They were responsible for the pastoral needs of their communities and for the explanation of Orthodox faith and practice to others. It is within this context that the impetus for publishing a specialized Study Bible for Orthodox Christians in North America can best be understood, as well as the subsequent critique it engendered. The publication was intended to help new, and potential evangelical converts to Orthodox Christianity realize the Scriptural bases for the doctrine and practice of the Orthodox Church, as well as to provide Scriptural teaching material for those 'cradle' Orthodox interested in studying the Bible. It is fair to say that the publication of the *Orthodox Study Bible* was initiated primarily through the lens of *pastoral practice*.

The *Orthodox Study Bible* Old Testament Project, currently underway, addresses many of the criticisms originally levelled. A multi-year undertaking to produce a new English translation of the Septuagint, the Old Testament Project is scheduled for release in 2007. Its Psalms will be organized into *kathismata*, and its notes will no doubt be diligently corrected. The authors of this project have been beaten to the punch; however, by an academic oriented New English

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

Translation of the Septuagint published by Oxford University Press, and related to the New Revised Standard Version.<sup>20</sup> This NETS, as it is known, is in many ways a truly critical edition, brought to life under the auspices of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies (IOSCS). It must be appreciated, however, that it was never the aspiration of the *Orthodox Study Bible* to be what the NETS project is. The Thomas Nelson volume intends to be "Study Bible," in the same vein as the original, the NKJV boilerplate corrected by Rahlfs LXX, providing accessible resources for those Orthodox Christians interested in studying the Bible to do so with a greater level of understanding, and in keeping with their Tradition.

Upon examining the Old Testament Project's website <[www.lxx.org](http://www.lxx.org)>, and speaking with participants in the project, it is clear that this project is not intending to be a high-level "critical edition." Indeed, the site advertises to its visitors that those who have some literacy with the Greek language should contact them as potential translators. Thankfully, the translation phase is already complete, and most of the translators listed on the site, if not Septuagint scholars per se, appear to have impressive academic qualifications and significant linguistic experience. Clearly the *Orthodox Study Bible's* Old Testament Project has learned the lessons of the past decade, creating an accessible, Orthodox edition of the Old Testament.

In the final analysis, the *Orthodox Study Bible* appears to be a valuable way-marker in the maturation of Orthodox identity in North America. It shows that the AEOM, which no longer uses that name, has made a significant contribution. The *Study Bible* has well fulfilled its goal of providing a helpful source for Biblical study to hundreds of parishes and countless Orthodox believers. Not surprisingly it has disappointed others hoping for a critically valuable academic volume or

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<sup>20</sup> See Albert Pietersma, trans., *The Psalms: A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included Under that Title*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

one deeply formed by a long saturation in Orthodoxy. Most importantly; however, the *Orthodox Study Bible*, now more than a decade old, demonstrates the capability of the faith to graft into its midst people and concepts from the Evangelical Protestant community. While the sanctification of once foreign customs may be nothing new for Orthodoxy, this particular example is a dramatic step for North American Orthodox faithful in the past hundred years. In a way, it is a profoundly new thing for the Orthodox to have actually produced a "study Bible" for popular use, and no doubt it is precisely this novelty that has provoked some of the sustained critique of the project. Nevertheless, "iron sharpens iron," and as the new translation of the Septuagint is completed and released, it seems that such critique has only served to focus the team's resolve. The sheer fact of its production is a sign of the increasing *institutional* maturity of Orthodoxy on this continent. In this light, the controversy surrounding the *Orthodox Study Bible* can be understood as a significant incremental step towards the Orthodox Church coming into its own in North America.

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