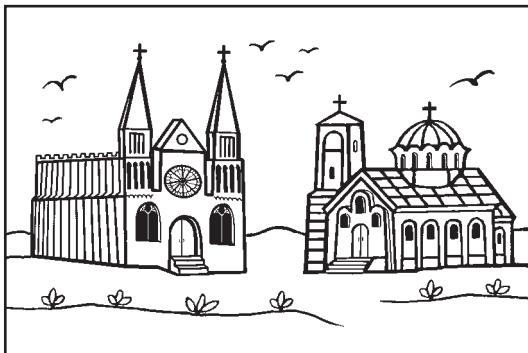


# THE ROMAN WEST AND THE BYZANTINE EAST



by  
Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna  
and  
Bishop Auxentios of Photiki

CENTER FOR TRADITIONALIST  
ORTHODOX STUDIES

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>CHAPTER I</b>	<b>13</b>
Historiography and the Christian Church	
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	<b>35</b>
Theology in the East and West	
<b>INDEX</b>	<b>57</b>

## INTRODUCTION

This book is a revision and amplification of the introductory chapter in a book published by the first author (Archbishop Chrysostomos—then an Archimandrite and Abbot of the Saint Gregory Palamas Monastery) in 1983: *Orthodoxy and Papism*. That book, now out of print, contained, in addition to a comparative treatment of Eastern and Western Christian traditions from an historiographical and comparative theological perspective, a translation of Photios Kontoglou’s famous commentary on Orthodoxy and the Latin Church, “What Orthodoxy Is and What Papism Is.” Both authors have worked carefully to preserve, in this separate work, the spirit of Kontoglou’s uncompromising and critical approach to the relationship between Orthodoxy and Latin Christianity, but in the present volume without some of the terse language so characteristic of the inimitable style of this great and memorable man of letters and champion of the Greek Orthodox Faith.

Many Orthodox Christians living in the West have a truncated and distorted view of the history of their Church. This is partly because many of the Orthodox in Western Europe and the Americas come from a Greek Catholic background, having entered into the Orthodox Church as part of the massive return of Slavic Uniates from Rome following the communist revolutions in Eastern Europe earlier last century. One Orthodox jurisdiction in the United States, the Orthodox Church in America, is still largely a Church of believers whose forebears were a generation ago attached to the Roman Unia—a fact almost forgotten among its present Faithful. The bulk of these former Uniates are still very much the captives of historiographies, theologies, and customs imposed upon them by their Latinized ancestors. Their struggle for Orthodoxy—though there are among them, fortunately, some with deep roots in the Orthodox ethos—is part of a yet unfinished struggle for a genuine Orthodox identity.

At the same time, the ecumenical movement has taken its toll on the Orthodox Church. Doing so in a spirit which engenders and demands respect and love for non-Orthodox Christians—the kind of love that one would expect from a mother—the Orthodox Church claims to represent the Church established by Christ, to be the very continuation of that Church in present times, and to be the repository of all “that the Lord gave, the Apostles preached, and the Fathers preserved,” as one Church Father puts it. This vision is at odds with the “ecclesiology” of contemporary ecumenism, which is no longer so much a movement that would guarantee the Orthodox to believe as they do, but one which would demand of Orthodoxy loyalty to an ecclesiological relativism. This demand has caused many Orthodox to capitulate to a view of the Church which constitutes virtual spiritual self-abnegation. And in this capitulation, some Orthodox Churches have failed to teach their Faithful what it means to be Orthodox: what it means to be preservers of the criterion of Truth, the Mother Church of Christianity.

The purpose of the present book, then, is to provide a sharp contrast—perhaps a bit too sharp at times—between the Roman West and the Byzantine East, between the Church of Rome and the Eastern Orthodox Churches from which the Roman Catholic Church emerged and to which it was once so closely bound as a Church of Orthodox Martyrs, Saints, and Hierarchs. The Orthodox Christian who thinks that he is an “Eastern Catholic,” who belongs to a Church that differs from the Church of Rome only by virtue of its married clergy and an “Eastern Pope” in Constantinople, will be shocked by what he reads in these pages. For, indeed, the Eastern and Western Churches are still as far from one another as the east is from the west. And if this separation is lamentable, knowing about it is the surest path to reunion. Reunion wrought by misunderstanding and ignorance is false reunion and is a violation of the spirit of Christianity—as witnessed by the false Union of Florence (a reunion imposed on the Orthodox by

force and with a spirit which should embarrass the West) and by other such superficial efforts at the political, rather than spiritual, reconciliation of the Eastern and Western Churches.

The West has gained ascendancy. Its distortions of history have prevailed. Political ecumenism, a Western disease that infected the Eastern Church at the beginning of the last century, has helped to perpetuate these distortions. Some Westerners, then, feeling their power and guarding the prerogatives of cultural and political ascendancy, will find much of what we write in this book insulting. We believe that others, however, will understand that things spiritual rest on the sharp edge of truth, which divides away both arrogance and power. Westerner or Easterner, a stark contrast of two differing traditions is something that can aid any Christian in understanding who he is and what must be done in discovering that ultimate truth which unites all of us, despite our divisions—which, honestly understood, gives our very divisions meaning!

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“One of the most difficult tasks in this age of relativism—a relativism that allows, for the most part, no deviations from its intolerant spirit of tolerance—is to speak of things that are different and things that are ‘true’ or unique. The modern spirit is largely one of believing that no one has primacy, that no one is ‘right,’ that everything has a ‘little truth,’ and that truth itself is a relative thing! This spirit tells us how much we have lost in terms of a true understanding of the intellectual spirit. Knowledge is the search for truth: for a unique, singular answer. The ancients sought truth, not as something relative, but as a thing unto itself. Traditional philosophy has been a quest for some universal criterion—at least in its more memorable expressions. And Christianity is based on a single pillar which we call the Truth of truths, the ultimate singular criterion of life: Christ. This little book takes us back to the quest for truth and tells us why we Orthodox believe that our Church is true to the Church established by the Apostles, why She has historical and spiritual primacy. It does so by pointing out differences and by the bold proclamation of Orthodoxy’s uniqueness. That this is done with scholarly objectivity, a spirit of love for that which differs from Orthodoxy, and with a sense of loyalty to Orthodoxy—this is something that commends this book to Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike. It is a book which makes a difficult statement in difficult times in a superb way, with the authority of two outstanding and respected Orthodox scholars.”

*Father James Thornton*