

**"Reviews: "L'Orthodoxie" par l'Archipetre S.Boulgakoff". Francis House**

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REVIEWS:

**FRANCIS HOUSE**

**"L'Orthodoxie" par l'Archipetre Serge Boulgakoff. pp.271.  
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Any book by Father Boulgakoff cannot fail to be of the greatest interest to all members of the Fellowship. In substance «L'Orthodoxie» is a comprehensive survey of the teaching of the Orthodox Church. It contains chapters on - «The ecclesiastical tradition», «The Unity of the Church», «Orthodox Dogma», «The Sacraments», «Orthodox Ethic», «Orthodoxy and the State», «Orthodox Eschatology» and «Orthodoxy and heterodoxy». It is thus both an excellent introduction to Orthodox thought, and for those whose knowledge of Orthodoxy has not yet crystallised out into a unified conception a valuable aid to coordination.

But for all that it covers so much ground in so short a compass, Father Boulgakoff has written something of great worth, much more than a textbook. Especial care is given to the consideration of the points of issue that arise whenever the relations of Orthodoxy and non-Orthodox Churches are under discussion. A good example is the treatment of the question of the relation of Tradition to Holy Scripture. Father Boulgakoff goes very carefully into the questions raised by Protestant theologians. He deals first with the attitude of Orthodoxy to scientific criticism of the Bible and to the closely related question of the right of individual interpretation. «Orthodoxy», he declares, «has no reason at all for avoiding the modern scientific spirit, so long as this means sincere research and not merely giving free rein to the prejudices of the age» (p.211)

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(This is illustrated, by reference to the Anglican authority of «Essays Catholic and Critical»). On the other hand Holy Scripture must be understood *in the Spirit* of the Church, that is to say in conjunction with the tradition of the Church and not outside it. But the fact remains that God has given us each our own power of thought and in the past our own personal duty has not been

accomplished. In other words, the tradition of the Church does not put the voice of the past in the place of the voice of the present; through the tradition the past does not kill the present, but gives it fresh force»(p.36) Next he describes the nature of the tradition of the Church, contrasting the Orthodox conception of the free work of the Spirit with the Roman Catholic method of dogmatic exegesis. Finally he points out the very intimate connection between Holy Scripture and the tradition of the Church. This connection is so close that it is impossible to say which is superior. «The tradition of the Church bears witness to the Holy Scripture, and Holy Scripture is itself a part of the tradition» (p.25). To follow the extreme Protestant reaction in holding «the Bible to be the unique source of Christian doctrine, is to make Christianity the religion of a book instead of the religion of the spirit and of truth - a religion of the scribes of the New Testament» (p.30) But «to forbid the people to read the Bible is a heresy» (p.30) and «tradition is always founded on Holy Scripture, and is an interpretation of it... That which exists as a seed in the Scripture, develops in the tradition» (p.26).

This summary will suffice to exemplify the relevance and vitality of Father Boulgakoff's book, and its great importance in oecumenical thinking.

The same characteristics of clarity of exposition combined with a vivid sense of tendencies of modern thought, are exemplified in the chapter on the hierarchy and the sacraments.

Here there is no space for further illustration of these points, but we cannot conclude without referring to the chapter on the relations of Orthodoxy to other Christian Churches. The argument of the chapter is not unfairly represented by the following quotations: "The Orthodox Church is conscious that she is the true Church... and she can desire only one thing; that the whole Christian world may become Orthodox... But what is the meaning of these words? Do they mean that all must become members of a particular ecclesiastical organisation? Is there to be a conquest by an ecclesiastical "imperialism"? But actually there does not exist even in Orthodoxy a single ecclesiastical organisation into which one can enter... The only solution is this: these (other Christian) communities, while preserving their historical characteristics, national and local, should come closer to Orthodox life and doctrine, and become capable of forming part of the unity of the oecumenical Church as autocephalous churches. Undoubtedly such exterior Reunion presupposes a corresponding internal movement. Such a movement is not impossible, for all churches, even those whose, faith is very far from that of the Church, retain a very considerable part of the universal tradition, and, in consequence, participate in Orthodoxy. They all possess «a grain» of Orthodoxy; and this Orthodox spirit, which lives in the universal Church, is more apparent to the eyes of God, than to those of men... But unity can scarcely be

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achieved by extracting an abstract minimum on which all ecclesiastical organisations would agree. Only a rapprochement between the Churches founded on the maximum of their common good can lead the Christian world to real unity. This maximum is Orthodoxy... Orthodoxy does not wish to compel anyone to submit, but to comprehend; beyond the efforts of men, this is the work of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the Church» (pp.262-269).

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