



David Bradshaw is teaching philosophy at the University of Kentucky and the author of a fascinating book about the differences between Eastern Christianity and the Western Christianity, "Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom", Cambridge University Press 2004 (translated in Romanian by Dragos Dasca and Vasile Barzu in 2010) and Winner of the Journal of the History of Ideas's Morris D. Forkosch prize.

Dr. Bradshaw was kind enough to talk with us about the problems of Orthodoxy in USA, the importance of Augustin in order to understand the West and many other fertile subjects, in an interview with karamazov.ro. [English version.](#)

How did you discover Orthodoxy? Some of the converts are attracted by the rituals, the Liturgy and, basically, "the living tradition". Others are enchanted especially with the theology. They find problems in Absolute Divine Simplicity model and discover that the God/Divine Energies concepts make much more sense. Other people are trying to find

the faith "as once delivered to the saints" (I am not saying these are the only ways). What was the main reason behind your conversion?□

I had a professor in college who was Orthodox. He invited me to church and later, when I began to be interested, loaned me *The Orthodox Church* by Timothy (now Kallistos) Ware. The historical section of this book was a real eye-opener. It made me see that Orthodoxy is simply the continuation of Christianity as it has existed since the first century in the lands evangelized by the apostles. There has been growth and development, of course, but never a radical break such as occurred during the Middle Ages (and again later in the Reformation) in the West. So recognizing Orthodoxy as the "faith once delivered to the saints" was my most fundamental reason, although the beauty of the Liturgy and the kindness of my professor and his family were also important.

How would you describe the state of Orthodoxy in USA? We could see in the last decades some important figures coming from the New World. (Seraphim Rose is the first name that comes in mind, but there are others too). Does Southern Culture has any role to play in this aspect?

I am rather gloomy about the state of Orthodoxy in the USA. The different jurisdictions are no closer to union than they have ever been. Several of them (such as the OCA, to which I belong) have suffered debilitating scandals in recent years. Many parishes still suffer from an overemphasis on ethnic culture, and they expend their energy on ethnic fundraisers rather than teaching, evangelizing, or serving the poor. On top of all this, the internet has made it easy to spread rumors, and there is a great deal of mutual suspicion between liberals and conservatives over issues such as communing of homosexuals and gay marriage. In this way Orthodoxy in the US reflects divisions within the culture at large. We do very little that might be considered an Orthodox witness to America.

On the bright side, Ancient Faith Radio has made much good material accessible (www.ancientfaith.com)
. Also, we have many more monasteries than we did a few decades ago. They are still few and small by the standards of the Old World, but at least we are moving in the right direction. If more of our parishes could form close relationships with monasteries, then we would begin to see Orthodoxy here acquiring a vigor and integrity that could make a real impact.

You talk in one of your conferences about how Orthodoxy can contribute to American

intellectual life. It's really something of a paradox because here in the Eastern part of the Europe there are strong statements from (secular) intellectuals and scholars, some of them educated in Anglo-American Universities, about getting rid of any form of religious traces, and most of all, of Orthodoxy. How do you see this situation?

In my experience, people raised in Orthodox countries often cannot see Orthodoxy as anything but a burden from the past. They associate it with superstition, obscurantism, corruption of the clergy, and in general with a failure to adapt to the conditions of modern life. This was already true in the nineteenth century, as one can see in Dostoevsky. I think that Dostoevsky gave the best answer to this sort of attitude in his portrayal of Elder Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*. To think "I must accommodate myself to the modern world" is actually a very shallow attitude, since it overlooks the question of what is true, and especially what is true about oneself. It makes my life simply a plaything of the world around me. The portrayal of Elder Zosima shows how one can move beyond that sort of attitude to a deeper awareness of spiritual reality.

"What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" It's obvious the modern world lost something fundamental when it turned its back to Christianity, but can we, as Orthodox people, learn something, in educating our children for example, not from modernity, but from Classical pagan world?

The ancient Greeks spoke of education as *paideia*, meaning by this not just the acquisition of knowledge but the formation of character and the development of a cultivated approach to life. One can find a description of such education—very schematic and sometimes tongue-in-cheek, but still illuminating—in Plato's *Republic*. It's not a "recipe" to be followed naively, but it has a great deal of wisdom. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is another great source. Studying these two books will make it clear how our habits, pastimes, and seemingly insignificant pursuits all contribute to the formation of character. We as Orthodox definitely need to recover this understanding of education, since apart from it our ability to receive Orthodoxy is hampered by narrowness and shallowness of soul.

Aristotle and Plato are painted on the walls in some of the Romanian churches. You argue in your book about the importance of the Aristotelian concept of "energeia" for the theological development of Eastern Christianity. How should we look as Christians on their achievements and where should we depart from them?

This is a complicated question, since there is much real wisdom in Plato & Aristotle as well as

many ways in which they go wrong. In general they have great insight about human life, but they fail to recognize God as a personal being because they lack Biblical revelation. I've written about the various ways in which the Church Fathers drew on them in many publications, particularly two forthcoming papers, "Plato in the Cappadocian Fathers" and "The Presence of Aristotle within Byzantine Theology."

We know that most (all?) of the Fathers had a classical education. Did Christian thinkers lost something when they reject (deliberately or not) the classical model of education and "the lost tools of learning"? Saints with a great theological culture are not very often these days.

Please see # 4.

Do you think we are headed for a new catacomb existence? And I am not thinking primarily about what is happening in the Middle East, but also about the regulations regarding religions in schools, also some unusual restrictions in preaching, "hate speech" and so on.

I tend to think that the catacombs are still a long way off. Most liberals shy away from anything that openly smacks of persecution. Of course that can change, and sometimes it doesn't take a majority to make persecution happen. This has been the case, for example, with the activity of the so-called human rights courts in places like Canada and the E.U. But even so, it's a long way from occasional egregious abuses of power to real persecution.

You also teach political philosophy at the University ofWhat can bring Christianity (Orthodoxy) to the Enlightenment perspectives about politics and the way modern political philosophy is regarding human nature?

Another big question! One thing I think Orthodoxy can definitely bring is an awareness that the passions—greed, resentment, jealousy, etc.—are not simply given facts of our nature, but can be fought and overcome. A great deal of modern politics simply consists of people using the state to try to gratify their passions. They feel this is justified because philosophers ever since Hobbes have told them that it is what politics is for. Even more libertarian-leaning philosophers such as Locke and Mill simply take for granted that we all want to gratify our passions for

pleasure and acquisition, and see the state as protecting an arena where that can be done. This is one reason why I think that a real monastic witness has the power to transform modern society (see # 2 above).

Orthodoxy is undeniably more otherworldly than other versions of Christianity. In this context, what is the best form of government for an Orthodox culture and way of life?

I don't think there's a single form of government that's best over-all. Each has its advantages and drawbacks, and which one is best for a given people will depend on that people's history and character. Of course many Orthodox societies have been monarchical, but I see that as saying more about their history than about Orthodoxy per se. By the same token, I don't think that liberal democracy is necessarily what every country should seek. Each has to accommodate its own people in ways that may be unique.

Is it possible to have an "empirical dogmatic" or "experiential theology" as John Romanides pretends? □

I have to admit that I don't know Romanides' work well enough to venture an opinion. He did excellent work on the Fathers in the 1950s and 60s, but I gather that afterward he became a bit eccentric.

Augustin is having a very hard time when you read recent Orthodox scholars. Can we safely say that all European philosophical tradition is a series of footnotes to Augustin, as a social thinker like Robert Nisbet, for example, does?

Yes, that's a good way to put it! Augustine's influence simply cannot be exaggerated, even on non-Christian thinkers.

Was Enlightenment a natural movement following the Augustinian idea of God?

I tend to think of it more as a reaction to the scholastic idea of God—or rather, to the conflicting strands in that idea, and the resulting incoherence. It's true that many of these strands derive from Augustine, but one also can't overlook the intervening history.

What are the greatest dangers for the Orthodox faith in post modernity?

The greatest danger is always simply that we fail to seek God in heartfelt contrition and prayer. I don't think that will ever change

Do you think the post Christian world will embrace the American (Gnostic) religion, as Harold Bloom recommends? Or will it have a nominalist (scientist) outlook?

Probably closer to the former. Even self-proclaimed naturalists still want science to provide some kind of substitute for God, something that can give a sense of being part of a higher order of reality. The movie Contact (based on a novel by Carl Sagan) is a good example.

How do you argue with a radical nominalist (positivist)?

I think Nietzsche made the essential point at the beginning of Book V of The Gay Science, in a section called "How we, too, are still pious." He points out that if the materialistic (or naturalistic) picture of the world is true, there is no reason why one should seek to know the truth for its own sake. One might seek it to the extent that doing so helps one gratify one's desires, but that's not at all the same as following the truth wherever it leads. So the question to pose to the naturalist is, Why do you value truth? Is it merely because you think that knowing the truth will help you satisfy your desires? Why do you think that, when undoubtedly you have often found the truth disappointing? Why shouldn't we simply pick and choose what to believe according to what makes us happy? After all, most people do this anyway. Nietzsche argues that to recognize that one should follow the truth wherever it leads is already a form of belief in God. I think he's right about that.

Please, name, for our readers, some of the books that have made a great impact on you in the last years!

One that I read for my political philosophy class was *Pornified* by Pamela Paul. What it describes is disgusting but also a sort of window on the modern soul. I've found that it leads to good discussions in class, as students are very aware of that pornography is all around them. A political book I'm reading right now is *The Great Degeneration* by Niall Ferguson. It's very illuminating about what's gone wrong in the modern economy and how the welfare state has corrupted society. I'm also reading *The Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov. I believe this book is probably well known in Eastern Europe, but I'd never heard of it until last year. Among Orthodox books, I found *Orthodoxy and the West* by Christos Yannaras highly informative, and I am looking forward to reading *The Ascent of Christian Law* by John McGuckin. But to tell you the truth I spend more time reading the Fathers and patristic scholarship than I do on recent books.