

A GUIDE TO ORTHODOX LIFE

Some Beliefs, Customs, and Traditions of the Church



Protopresbyter David Cownie and
Presbytera Juliana Cownie

CENTER FOR TRADITIONALIST ORTHODOX STUDIES

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INTRODUCTION

The Orthodox Church, especially now with the freedom of Eastern Europe, is gaining ever greater attention in the Christian West. The Western world is suddenly discovering that the second largest Christian Church, numbering 350 million or more souls, lays claim to antiquity—indeed to a history that reaches back to the time of the Apostles—and to a rich spiritual tradition that reaches far beyond the limits of Western theological thought. As they rediscover the Church of the Tsars and of the nineteenth-century Eastern monarchies, the Christians of the Occident are also discovering a Christianity older than the Church of Rome, a Church which discussed and resolved many of the issues of the Reformation long before Western Christianity was separated from its Eastern roots. They are finding that the old political and theological prejudices that served to relegate that separation to the short memory of history are falling away. With the light of new knowledge from the East, we in the West are coming to understand that it was Rome that broke away from the ancient Patriarchates of the East in 1054, not the Eastern Orthodox Church which cut itself off from the Latin Church. We are coming to see the truncated vision of Christianity which has marked our intellectual history for more than five centuries. And as this happens, more and more Western Christians are embracing the Orthodox Church as the criterion of Christianity, as the source and mother of their own beliefs.

Conversion to the Orthodox Church is not easy. In the West, especially, immigrants brought with them from their homelands an Orthodoxy which very quickly accommodated to the Christianity of the West, losing much of its essence and, under the influence of the ecumenical movement, coming to think of itself, not as the historical Church, the very Church of Christ, but as one of many other ecclesiastical bodies. As a result, Orthodoxy in the West is often an artificial version of traditional Orthodox Christianity, covering its inauthenticity with an ec-

clesiology derived from Western notions of the Church and rooted in its ideas of “officialdom” and “relevancy.” This even has led at times to a spirit of antagonism towards True Orthodoxy—that Orthodoxy of resistance to the worldly spirit and to political “officialdom” that has always produced pillars of Christian virtue—that impedes a deeper understanding of our Faith. In such an atmosphere, we feel it necessary, as converts ourselves, to offer to those coming to the Orthodox Faith a vision of the practical Orthodox life as it is lived, not in the artificial Orthodoxy of the West, but by the pious traditionalist Orthodox of Greece, the Levant, and Eastern Europe. In this way, we hope to help new converts drink from the sweet waters of a genuine Orthodoxy, that we might establish in the West, too, wells of that life-giving, refreshing drink.

To this end, we have tried in the various sections of this short book to summarize some of the traditional beliefs and customs of the Orthodox Church as they relate to the daily life of the believer and to the Church’s worship. We have brought these elements into focus in our discussion of the whole cycle of Christian life, from Baptism to marriage to the culmination of human life, death. We hope that our few, necessarily limited commentaries will help Orthodox converts and non-Orthodox Westerners to gain a more genuine glimpse into that ancient way that leads to human transformation and union with Christ: Orthodoxy.

The Authors



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“Written in a simple and straightforward manner, this book provides us with more than basic insight into a wide range of traditions and customs of the Orthodox Church from the perspective of a traditionalist Priest and his wife, both converts and members of the American wing of the jurisdiction of Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili, a renowned zealot of the Greek Old Calendarist movement. Though I am not an Old Calendarist, I see in this excellent book evidence of the truth which they speak. Many of us Orthodox in the West are losing our traditions and know much less than we should about our Church. The Old Calendarists, like the Russian Old Ritualists, have much to teach us and to remind us about. ...A book like this can help all of us to know our Faith better. I heartily recommend it.”

Dr. M. Orlov

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