

## New Anthology

# *Hungry Orthodox Christian Reader: The “Hidden” Writings of Orthodox Christianity*

## Description

Many Orthodox writings currently available in English seem to be “hidden”: by the haze of academia, crossing of jurisdictional lines, and just plain unfamiliarity. This Reader is a sampler of and introduction to various texts, types of writings, and their sources for Orthodox people who want to know more about Orthodoxy but may not know where to look. The individual articles focus less on *what* we believe and more on *how* we believe, a foundational difference between East and West.

Many of the articles in this anthology are from multi-volume sets of books that an individual would naturally hesitate to purchase: because of their cost, the mystery of their contents, or the trepidation engendered by their bulk. Even if these multi-volume sets are available in the church library, their enormous size is daunting and discourages perusal. They are easily assumed to be for scholars, even though they contain normal, everyday, Orthodox reading. This anthology gives an encouraging glimpse into their contents.

Another highlighted source is monastic periodicals, which are generally unknown but would be helpful for any Orthodox reader. Some selections are from service books, sadly considered to be the domain of clergy, but potentially edifying for the laity: demystifying the services (“What are they saying?”) can engage the congregation and unveil the Mystery’s majesty.

Still other readings are from types of writings (e.g., homilies) that one might not think to investigate (“those are for priests”), and from authors whose very names are intimidating (“St Gregory Palamas is too scholarly, it would be completely over my head”). Though many people assume that these writings are too abstruse, arcane, unapproachable, they are surprisingly accessible—and delightful, to boot. In several instances, the writings have been translated and published only recently.

Each chapter is followed by a short section of Miscellanea comprising specimens, considerations, and suggestions of related books or authors. Many of these are **Parent Friendly** tips for busy parents and their children. The book also emphasizes the value of a church library to make these sources available to all members of the congregation.

One cannot *read* one’s way into Orthodoxy or, to the point, *salvation*. Nevertheless, reading is an integral, indispensable part of Orthodox life. This Reader will provide hungry Orthodox readers an introductory familiarity with those topics, authors, and genres that they might otherwise never discover. For individuals, adult education classes or discussion groups, and even older youth groups, the clearly referenced *sources* (in English!) can open the way to a lifetime of reading, prayer, and *praxis*.

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# *Hungry Orthodox Christian Reader*

## Synopsis

### Introduction

*How* we believe is at least as important as *what* we believe. This is exemplified in the various selections in this anthology, but the *sources* of the material are the point—for continuing Orthodox instruction, example, and encouragement. Concludes with bishop’s daily prayer for “Thy Church in this land.”

### A View to Salvation

#### Spiritual Anthropology

*Type/Source:* Monastic Catechism (continuing education); St Symeon the New Theologian [†1022], Classics of Western Spirituality series

*Point:* However “advanced” 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans may be, the human condition remains the same.

*What:* A description of our spiritual condition, how it came about, and how God uses it—if we turn to Him—to confer upon us even greater blessings and benefactions in salvation.

#### The Path to Salvation

*Type/Source:* (Somewhat) Contemporary Saints; St Theophan the Recluse [†1894], St Herman Press

*Point:* We can’t do it alone or only by our own effort.

*What:* The need for guidance on the path, the beginning of Christian zeal, the need for grace.

### A Different Way of Seeing

#### The Shepherd of Hermas

*Type/Source:* Holy Fathers/Ancient Instruction [c. A.D. 50–200]; *Ante Nicene Fathers* series

*Point:* An example of a frequently referenced ancient text that is available in English. These texts are well worth finding and reading! When reading modern authors, it is good to follow up their references to broaden one’s knowledge of the Holy Fathers and the Church’s enduring texts as well as to verify the accuracy and interpretation of the modern authors who reference them.

*What:* Excerpts from the *Visions* and *Commandments* giving a heavenly perspective on our earthly life.

#### The Unity of Christ’s Ideal

*Type/Source:* Contemporary periodical; *The True Vine*, Holy Transfiguration Monastery

*Point:* There is one Christian ideal, one goal, not one for monks and a different one for laity.

*What:* A letter from Russian Saint Archbishop Hilarion Troitsky [†1929] explaining that, although monks and laity go about their lives in different ways, their aim—salvation, communion with God—and their obligations—purity, righteous living, a striving love of God—are the same.

### A Different Way of Knowing

#### The Samaritan Woman at the Well

*Type/Source:* Biblical Commentary; St Theophylact [†c.1126], *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to John*, Chrysostom Press

*Point:* A short passage of Scripture contains more than meets the eye.

*What:* Commentary on Christ's conversation with the Samaritan woman employing several different methods of biblical interpretation.

### **The Mystery of Knowledge**

*Type/Source:* Contemporary exposition of an ancient Father; *Sourozh Magazine*

*Point:* Orthodox knowing and understanding are radically different from the fragmented and self-limiting Science, Realism, and Rationalism of the Western mindset.

*What:* St Justin Popovich [†1979] explains the theory of knowledge of St Isaac the Syrian [†c.700]—the kinds of knowledge and the spiritual modes in which knowledge moves and changes—emphasizing the need for the healing (purification) of the organs of understanding through asceticism.

## **A Different Association**

*Point:* The saints are not just pretty pictures but are real, alive, our friends and helpers; their Lives guide and instruct us; they are truly worthy of our love and veneration. This section most clearly demonstrates how the *what* we believe translates into the *how* we believe.

### **The Communion of Saints**—the *what* we believe

*Type/Source:* Essay by Timothy Ware (1964) from *The Orthodox Ethos* (out of print)

*What:* Discussion of who the saints are and how and why we venerate them.

### **Valentine**—the *how* we believe

*Type/Source:* Contemporary letter

*What:* Discussion of how to approach the saints, the value of reading the longer versions of their lives (now available in English), and strategies for incorporating them into one's daily life.

### **Annunciation Canon**—the *what* and *how in action*

*Type/Source:* Services; *Festal Menaion*, St Tikhon's Press, St John of Damascus [†c.749]

*What:* Insight into how greatly the Theotokos is honored by God and revered by angels and men, and an example of the beauty of the Church's hymns.

## **A Different Attitude**

### **A Sower Went Out to Sow His Seed**

*Type/Source:* Homily; Saint Gregory Palamas [†1359], *The Homilies*, #47, Mount Thabor Publishing

*Point:* An example of homilies as a good source for understanding Scripture and Christian life; St Gregory Palamas *is* accessible to normal people; the need for our personal involvement in understanding and salvation.

*What:* The work that we must do to prepare the ground of our hearts/souls in order to receive the seeds of the Word of God that they may produce a good harvest. (Repent: pay attention, stop sinning, do good works)

### **Glory Be to God!**

*Type/Source:* Magazine article, St Ignatius Brianchaninov [†1867]; *The Orthodox Word*, St Herman Press

*Point:* God's providence directs everything around us to our benefit, filling us with doxology.

*What:* Despite our utter sinfulness, God surrounds us with his ineffable goodness. Trusting in and submitting ourselves to Him, we unceasingly praise Him—and this giving of glory is itself a powerful weapon against our enemies.

## **Weekday Hymnal**

*Type/Source:* The Church's hymnography; HTM (Brookline) prosomia, Russian special melody

*Point:* Singing and chanting belong not only in Church, but in one's heart and daily life.

*What:* Short, easy-to-sing hymns for the commemorations of each day of the week.

## **Divine Service**

### **Treatise on Prayer**

*Type/Source:* Liturgics/Holy Fathers; St Symeon of Thessalonike [†1429], Hellenic College Press

*Point:* Basic description of the Midnight Service as the context for the laity's daily morning prayers.

*What:* St Symeon's explications of the Trisagion Prayers, Our Father, and Gloria, and their origins.

### **Short Hours**

*Type/Source:* Service/Prayers; *Unabridged Horologion*, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville

*Point:* Not only do the different days of the week have their own commemoration (see "Weekday Hymnal," above), but also every hour of the day.

*What:* Toward unceasing prayer and remembrance of God, the "Short Hours" that people in the world can observe, even in their busy workplaces.

### **Vesper Hymns**

*Type/Source:* Services; *Octoechos* [c.700–900], Eves of Sunday and Tuesday, St John of Kronstadt Press

*Point:* There are services besides Sunday Liturgy! The daily, spiritually formative teaching (hymns) of the Church that most American Orthodox have never heard.

*What:* Example of commemorations of the days of the week: Stichera and Aposticha of Saturday night Vespers, contrasting with Monday night's compunction and Forerunner hymns. Encouragement to become familiar with the structure of the services and actually to read the services.

## **Daily Nurture**

### **Prologue of Ohrid**

*Type/Source:* Daily Reading; St Nikolai Velimirovic [†1956], Serbian Diocese of W. America

*Point:* Example of daily reading.

*What:* One day from *Prologue of Ohrid*: includes lives of saints, Scripture, hymns, and homilies.

### **An Odd Chapter**

*Type/Source:* Holy Fathers [c.100–800]; multi-volume sets: *Ante Nicene Fathers*, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, *Fathers of the Church*, *Ancient Christian Writers*, *Classics of Western Spirituality*, *Cistercian Publications*

*Point:* To encourage use and investigation (don't be afraid!) of multi-volume works; these non-Orthodox-produced translations are reliable, even though the notes and commentaries that accompany them are suspect.

*What:* List of authors and titles from the above series: an example of the many works of the Holy Fathers that are available in English.

## **Daily Struggle**

### **Self-Restraint**

*Type/Source:* Desert Fathers; *The Evergetinos* [c.300–800], Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies

*Point:* Fasting: varying lists of detailed rules that one encounters can be confusing; the discipline of fasting can seem pharisaical or superfluous, become tiresome, or can be simply overwhelmed by contemporary culture.

*What:* Excerpts that encourage fasting and demonstrate the means and goal; more like general strategies than specific rules.

### **The War of Thoughts**

*Type/Source:* Contemporary Saints; St Paisios the New [†1994], the *Spiritual Counsels* series

*Point:* Part of daily struggle is with thoughts, cultivating good thoughts, expelling evil.

*What:* A nun discusses the battle against thoughts with Elder Paisios; spiritual life is based on thought; purification (healing) depends on vigilant control of thoughts.

### **Life of Holy Monastic Martyr Stephen the New, Confessor for the Icons**

*Type/Source:* Lives of Saints; St Demetrius of Rostov [†1709], *Great Collection of*, Chrysostom Press

*Point:* Temptation is more than a piece of chocolate cake; icons are not an idle luxury.

*What:* St Stephen [†766] is called before the iconoclast emperor and gives his defense of the icons. He is imprisoned with many other confessors (who have suffered horribly) and is then barbarously murdered by a mob.

## **Environmental Review**

### **Life of St Niphon, Bishop of Constantia**

*Type/Source:* Lives of Saints; St Demetrius of Rostov [†1709], *Great Collection of*, Chrysostom Press

*Point:* Review of this Reader: St Niphon's different way of seeing, knowing, association, etc.; and a Re-View of the invisible world (environment) we inhabit.

*What:* St Niphon [†c.350] has a good upbringing but falls into bad company. Eventually he repents and is able to see angels and demons at work, e.g., demons whispering in workmen's ears until the workmen come to blows.

## **Epilogue**

The banquet is ready and waiting. Implementation is up to the individual (with God's help and Church's direction).

## **Appendix**

However diverse our lives may be, three points of intersection: sharing of books/ideas and support, communal prayer, and private prayer.

**A Church Library:** Because so much material is now available in English, and much of it is only in multi-volume sets—too expensive (and even frightening) for normal individuals—churches should have libraries to make these things accessible to all. Reading should be encouraged, help provided.

**My Favorite Matins:** Description of a practical, weekday/workday matins service; encouragement of weekday services as part of developing Orthodox culture.

**Canon Basics:** Basic information about canons and “how-to” so people can pray canons at home.

**Reading Calendar** for *St Gregory Palamas: The Homilies*: an example of “occasional reading,” recommending to readers that large books do not have to be read in one sitting.

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