

Joan Mervyn Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010

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In 1986, when Joan Mervyn Hussey's groundbreaking book *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire* was first released (Joan Mervyn Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986]), most of the major works in the field of Byzantine history today did not yet exist. There were, of course, significant works such as Alexandr Vasiliev's *History of the Byzantine Empire, 324-1453* (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1958) and George Ostrogorsky's *History of the Byzantine State* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1969). Yet Hussey's uniquely comprehensive and original work immediately gained great popularity in the field, as she attempted to write the ecclesiastical history of the Byzantine state by placing it in a larger political framework.

The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire not only places the history of the Orthodox Church within the political history of the Byzantine Empire, but also presents a well-established framework for its ecclesiastical structure and organization. Hussey targets the ordinary, non-specialist but curious reader, and aims to provide an objective account of the empire's ecclesiastical history as part of Byzantine political history. In her own words, Hussey wanted "to trace the medieval history of Greek Orthodoxy in terms of challenge and response," and "to outline the organization of the Byzantine Church." (2) Her claim to objectivity is satisfying in the sense that she sides neither with the Greeks, nor with the Latins; the two major contemporary protagonists of the Christian world.

In the current 2010 edition, Andrew Louth adds a foreword and an updated bibliography. His most valuable contribution is the bibliography, which incorporates colossal works such as the three-volume *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (*The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander Kazhdan et al. [New York: Oxford University Press, 1991]), the eight-volume *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, of which the fifth volume is devoted to the detailed history of Orthodox Christianity (*The Cambridge History of Christianity, V.5, Eastern Christianity*, ed. Michael Angold [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006]), and the recent *Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies* (*Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys, John Haldon and Robin Cormack [Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008]). The addenda at the end of the bibliography also contain useful works in the categories of women, devotion to Virgin Mary, gender, magic/popular religion and art. Hussey had not touched upon

any of these subjects in her original book—a deficiency detected by Louth—and these categories are thus helpful updates to the 1986 edition.

Even today, however, Hussey's work is still so far clearly the most comprehensive among those which attempt to merge Byzantine political and Orthodox Church histories. Of the significant works in the literature, the only other corpus which can approach Hussey's comprehensiveness is perhaps a combination of two books: John Meyendorff's *The Orthodox Church: Its Past and Its Role in the World Today* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1962), and *The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982). Another prominent work in the same league as Hussey's would be John Anthony McGuckin's *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Its History, Doctrine, and Spiritual Culture* (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell, 2008). However, other important works on the Orthodox Church usually do not contrive to provide an ecclesiastical history of Orthodoxy within the Byzantine historical framework; the previous literature had mostly focused on dogmatic issues; some on liturgical, the others on organizational or modern issues of Orthodoxy.

The essays in the book are divided into two parts. The first part, *Challenge and Response within the Historical Framework*, contains eight chapters where the author presents a chronological story of the Church's history from the earliest period to the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453. It starts with the Christological problems in the early Middle Ages, and Hussey commences with the ecclesiastical councils of the fifth century over the nature of Christ and the relationship among the members of the Trinity. At the same time, this chapter also introduces the controversy between the Eastern and the Western churches. From this point on, one can trace the ups and downs of this relationship in line with the political circumstances examined. Hussey then moves on to the iconoclastic controversy, an event usually understood in isolation in the general literature, but which she regards as the continuation of the Christological problems (30). Today, scholars tend to emphasize how the financially weak Byzantine state attempted to benefit economically at the expense of a wealthy, iconophile monasticism to explain the iconoclastic movement, yet Hussey seems to favor the psychological impact of Islamic victories, as she stresses the Isaurian (Syrian) background of Leo III (r.717-41), the emperor who started the iconoclasm.

Compared to the more general fifth and sixth chapters, the third and the fourth chapters—"The Age of Photius 843-886" and "Leo IV's Dilemma: Nicholas Mysticus and Euthymius 886-925"—seem rather contracted. These two chapters mention the growing rivalry between the Orthodox and the Catholic churches over the principality of Bulgaria, the spread of Orthodoxy through Byzantine missionary activities, and some other internal issues like the controversy over tetragamy, when patriarch Nicholas Mystikos refused to

sanction Leo VI's fourth marriage, to Zoe Karbonopsina, in order to secure an heir. In the fifth and sixth chapters, "The Patriarchate (925-1025): The Predominance of Constantinople" and "Increasing Pressures on Constantinople and the Widening Gap 1025-1204", the political history of the time is depicted alongside ongoing ecclesiastical heresies such as Bogomilism, a sect from Bulgaria which rejected church hierarchy and called for a return to early Christianity. However, the most significant point the chapter touches upon is the Great Schism in 1054, which saw the reciprocal excommunication of the two churches. Hussey briefly yet frequently states the main pretexts behind the East-West Schism; azymes, or the use of unleavened bread in the Eucharist, the *filioque* ("and the son") issue over the divinity of Christ, the existence of purgatory, and the papal claims of catholic supremacy over the Orthodox Church. The gap between the two churches then widens over the course of the Fourth Crusade, which is discussed in the penultimate chapter of the book, "The Effects of the Fourth Crusade".

The last chapter, "Contacts: Failure and Achievements 1258-1453", articulates the increase in external threat, especially the Ottoman threat to the Byzantine state and the imperial effort to reunite the Eastern and Western churches at the expense of the former. The union of the two churches was to ensure papal support and Western military aid against the common enemy of the Christian faith, that is, the Ottomans. The union was achieved for a short time with the Council of Lyons in 1274, by the efforts of the emperor Michael VIII (r.1259-82). In the later phases, however, the more the Byzantine state lost power, the harder it became to meet the papal demands. A second union was achieved with the Council of Ferrara-Florence in 1438-9, yet neither the previous Council of Lyons nor the Council of Ferrara-Florence could get the support of the laymen. The last phase of the union issue is the celebration of the union in 1452, just months before the complete fall of the Byzantine state. Yet the legacy of the Orthodox Church was not impeded. With the appointment in 1454 of George Scholarios as patriarch by the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II (r.1444-46/1451-81), the Eastern Church survived, unlike the Byzantine state itself. Hussey thus ends the ecclesiastical history at the same point as the political history.

The second part of the book, "Organization and Life of the Orthodox Church in Byzantium", starts with an exploration of the core of the Orthodox faith in the gospels, the apostolic and the patristic traditions, and also the canons of the holy councils (304). Hussey then goes on to describe the members of the clergy, the canon law (comprised of both imperial and ecclesiastical laws), the synod and its orders, the festivals and the liturgy.

Along with the accompanying maps, lists of Byzantine emperors, popes and Constantinopolitan patriarchs, and with the extensive use of primary sources, as well as many journals, the book is one of the greatest contributions to the literature on the intertwined ecclesiastical and political

histories of the Byzantine period. The book, however, suffers from an absence of images, which makes it less lively and vivid than it could be. There is also an important historical aspect overlooked by Hussey: the role of the arriving Anatolian Turks in religious issues and the outcomes of this interaction between the Byzantines and the Turks. For example, it is widely-known that there was a specific group of people living in the empire who the Byzantines called *mixobarbaroi*, because of their mixed Turkish and Greek heritage, with the other ethnic half coming either from the maternal or the paternal side. Another aspect that is ignored is the Byzantine treatment of the bishoprics lost to Turkish settlement and their titular bishops, who mostly resided in Constantinople. Finally, there is a significant gap for the reader regarding what happened in Anatolia with the coming of the Turks, maybe not in political terms, but certainly in religious ones.

However, Hussey craves hard to present to the reader an exhaustively complete history of the Byzantine Church, itself never an official state department (1), and its cooperation with Byzantine politics, while also covering the main objectives of the Orthodox Church and how it functioned. The book is a peerlessly rich work, a *magnum opus* adorned with the fluidity of its narrative, and it seems that it will remain one of the first sources to consult for prospective historians of the Byzantine church for a very long time to come.

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