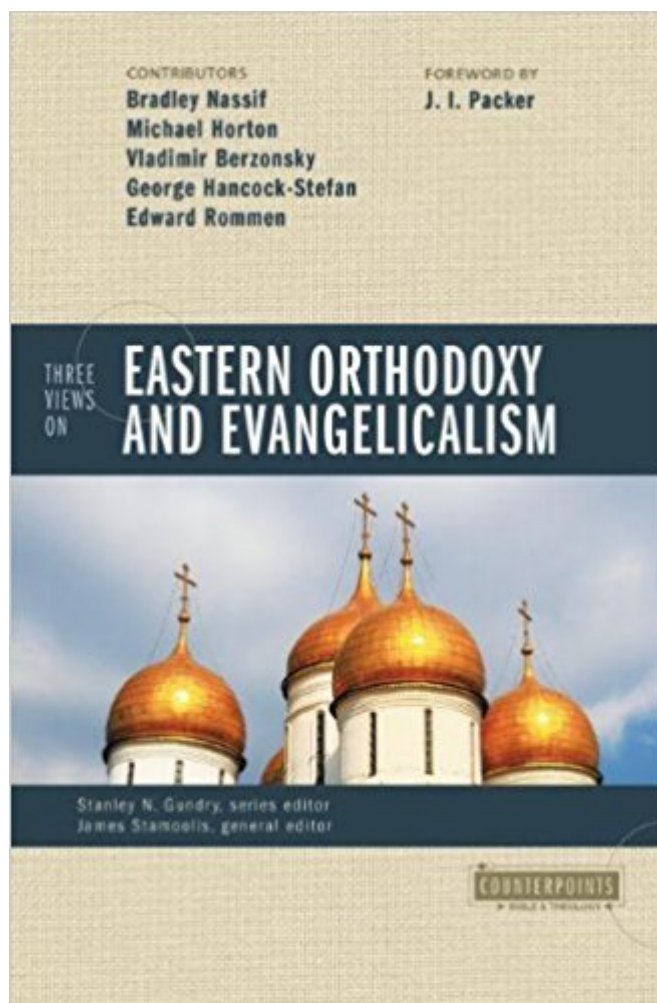


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# Three Views On Eastern Orthodoxy And Evangelicalism (Counterpoints)



## Synopsis

To some Western evangelicals, the practices of Eastern Orthodoxy seem mysterious and perhaps even unbiblical. Then again, from an Orthodox perspective, evangelicals lack the spiritual roots provided by centuries-old church traditions. Are the differences between these two branches of Christianity so sharp that to shake hands is to compromise the gospel itself? Or is there room for agreement? Are Eastern Orthodoxy and evangelicalism at all compatible? Yes, no, maybe—this book allows five leading authorities to present their different views, have them critiqued by their fellow authors, and respond to the critiques. Writing from an Orthodox perspective with a strong appreciation for evangelicalism, Bradley Nassif makes a case for compatibility. Michael Horton and Vladimir Berzonsky take the opposite stance from their respective evangelical and Orthodox backgrounds. And George Hancock-Stefan (evangelical) and Edward Rommen (Orthodox) each offer a qualified “perhaps.” The interactive Counterpoints forum is ideal for comparing and contrasting the different positions to understand the strengths and weaknesses of these two important branches of Christianity and to form a personal conclusion regarding their compatibility. The Counterpoints series provides a forum for comparison and critique of different views on issues important to Christians. Counterpoints books address two categories: Church Life and Bible and Theology. Complete your library with other books in the Counterpoints series.

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Stanley N. Gundry is executive vice president and editor-in-chief for the Zondervan Corporation. He has been an influential figure in the Evangelical Theological Society, serving as president of ETS and on its executive committee, and is adjunct professor of Historical Theology at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary. He is the author of seven books and has written many articles appearing in popular and academic periodicals. James J. Stamoolis (D. Theol., University of Stellenbosch) consults with educational and missionary agencies. He has been a missionary, an educator, and a missionary executive. He is the author of *Eastern Orthodox Mission Theology Today* and many articles in journals and encyclopedias. Bradley Nassif (PhD, Fordham University) is a professor of Biblical & Theological Studies at North Park University, Chicago, IL. He is the co-editor of *The Philokalia: Exploring a Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality* and general editor of *New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*. Michael Horton (PhD, DD) is Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary California. Author of many books, including *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way*, he also hosts the *White Horse Inn* radio program. He lives with his wife, Lisa, and four children in Escondido, California. Vladimir Berzonsky (D.Min., Ashland Theological Seminary) is pastor of Holy Trinity Orthodox Church in Parma, Ohio, and the author of *The Gift of Love and In*

the Image and Likeness of God. George Hancock-Stefan (Ph.D., Trinity International University) is the pastor of Central Baptist Church, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, and a seasoned teacher of church history and missions at several seminaries. Edward Rommen (D.Theol., University of Munich; D.Miss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is an Orthodox priest and pastor of Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Mission in Raleigh, North Carolina. He is the coauthor of *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models*.

The book is composed of essays that examine the differences and similarities between Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism. As one who works in both the Evangelical and Orthodox worlds I found this format to be beneficial. In addition to this topic being a difficult topic in and of itself the generalities are often broad. Eastern Orthodoxy has a variety of expressions that range from Ethiopian to Russian. Evangelicalism is all over the map from Pentecostal to Reformed, and everything in between. For the most part (I speak in broad terms) the Orthodox view in this book is Eastern European, while the Evangelical views are mostly American Reformed. The book is written in a format that allows free expression of ideas in the form of essays and an opportunity for agreement and rebuttal by the other essay writers. It is an easy read and very informative. There is common ground on the Gospel and I believe both Orthodox and Evangelical readers will find the book to be encouraging to our common faith. The most striking difference between Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism is the view of the atonement and the doctrine of salvation. Orthodoxy can learn from Evangelicalism in their zeal for the Gospel and salvation by faith apart from works. Evangelicals can learn from Orthodoxy concerning the doctrines of Christ and His incarnation. Far from being enemies the reader will find that we are brothers in Christ.

Increasing interest in the Eastern Orthodox is helped immensely with this book's publication. The three views pertains to five authorities giving their opinion as to compatibility between Eastern Orthodoxy and evangelicalism. One says yes, two say no, and one maybe. You'll have to read to figure out who lines up with which compatibility assessment. What is good about the exchange is the format of major essay by one, than the others react. This is excellent format and provides salient interaction to occur. Nuances are discovered and brought out, allowing the interested reader to explore. What salient differences provided here include: different authority of tradition and resultant view of Scriptures; totally different view of original sin; resultant divergent views of Apostle Paul's theology; resulting in different anthropology, esp. image and likeness issues which result in different soteriology. The two as Horton points out are not really that close, other than outstanding agreement

on Trinitarian issues, outside of filioque. What is lacking in this otherwise well done volume is limited confessional reaction from Reformed evangelical side, but realization that having Lutheran/Roman Catholic/Arminian etc., would be a huge and tiresome volume. For Lutherans, Issues Etc. just had an excellent interview in month of August, 2005 which can be listened to on their archives with Eastern Orthodox spokesman. This provides a good base to go from. Good sources cited for followup to the interested.

This book gets four stars because of both the great idea of comparing the two Christian traditions and Bradley Nassif. The other authors were very unprepared for the book. Michael Horton does the best job of the evangelicals but still gets some aspects of Orthodox theology wrong. Vladimir Berzonsky was the worst writer by far because he equated all evangelicals with Anabaptists in their theological views (particularly with the Sacraments). This is not his fault though, because the book itself does a horrible job explaining what evangelicalism is. The two evangelicals are (I think) Baptist and Presbyterian (or Reformed), but there are huge differences in these traditions, and I am truly shocked that none of the writers were Confessional Lutherans even though the historical meeting between the Patriarch of Constantinople and the Lutheran scholars of Tübingen is brought up in nearly every chapter. This means no writer defends the view of Lutherans that the bread and wine in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper have the real presence in them after they are blessed (with the exception of Dr. Nassif who also understands that the term usually applied for this which is Consubstantiation is a very poor term nearly no competent Lutheran and/or Episcopal scholar uses)! Nassif also used the best methodology in his analysis of doctrine (that of Christological Maximalism) thus showing many views, particularly of the Sacraments (if I may dare call them that) in the evangelical churches were argued over in the past by councils who found such views contrary to the doctrine of the Trinity and the Incarnation which all branches of non-heretical Christianity accept. My review should not be seen as a praise of just the Orthodox. Nassif happens to be an Orthodox writer who was at one time an evangelical and it shows in the quality of his presentation (even though I would say he should have made his position a maybe). The worst writer, Berzonsky both commits the aforementioned oversimplification but he also made it seem as if all the differences between the two were the lack of tradition (which in some ways I agree with), but also the denial of the council in which the iconodules won over the iconoclasts, which not all evangelicals would disagree with (i.e., not all evangelicals are iconoclasts....i.e. me). Overall I think that the book should have been much longer and should have been much more thought out by the last four writers. Nassif gets the gold medal....everyone else needs to repeat Seminary, or really read and try

to understand either "The Orthodox Church" by Bishop Kalistos Ware (and the Philokalia for the mystically minded) or Calvin's "Institutes of the Christian Religion" (and Luther's Large Catechism and the Book of Concord). This book is worth it for the first chapter. The responses are just kissing up to each other....usually :-).

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