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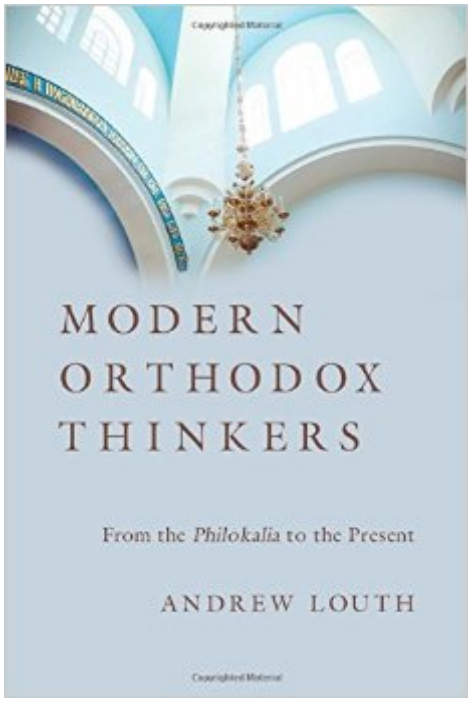
Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From The Philokalia To The Present



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Synopsis

Andrew Louth, one of the most respected authorities on Orthodoxy, introduces us to twenty key thinkers from the last two centuries. He begins with the Philokalia, the influential Orthodox collection published in 1782 which marked so many subsequent writers. The colorful characters, poets and thinkers who populate this book range from Romania, Serbia, Greece, England, France and also include exiles from Communist Russia. Louth offers historical and biographical sketches that help us understand the thought and impact of these men and women. Only some of them belong to the ranks of professional theologians. Many were neither priests nor bishops, but influential laymen. The book concludes with an illuminating chapter on Metropolitan Kallistos and the theological vision of the Philokalia.

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Customer Reviews

For one who hardly knows the difference between an archimandrite and an apolytikion, or a hatjis and a heretismoi, itÃ¢Â Â™s a bit of a stretch to pick up and stay with the 416 page paperback Ã¢Â ÂœModern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the PresentÃ¢Â Â•. Yet Andrew Louth, who serves as a priest in the Russian Orthodox parish in Durham and is professor emeritus of patristic and Byzantine studies at Durham University, England, as well as a visiting professor of Eastern Orthodox theology at the Amsterdam Centre of Eastern Orthodox Theology in the Faculty of Theology, the Free University, Amsterdam, has made what at first appears insurmountable into something obtainable. This scholarly tome leads an interested reader through the development of a

particular stream of Eastern Orthodox thought that winds its way from Mount Athos, to Russia, on to Paris, over into Greece, across to America and to finally settle in England. For the non-Orthodox, it is an unfamiliar world with its own language and choreography, but itÃ¢Â Â™s an intriguing world.The premise of Ã¢Â ÂœModern Orthodox ThinkersÃ¢Â Â• is stated squarely in the subtitle, Ã¢Â ÂœFrom the Philokalia to the PresentÃ¢Â Â•. The Philokalia was compiled in the eighteenth century by two Orthodox monks, St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarias of Corinth, on Mount Athos as an instructive guide for other monks. The work collected texts written by earlier Christian pastors, monks, theologians and spiritual guides as part of a renewal movement within the Orthodox Church that sought to restore the tradition of Byzantine monasticism, return to the Fathers, reestablish the importance of a monasticism that focused on prayer, especially the Jesus Prayer, and restore the role of spiritual fatherhood (9). Though the multi-volume work of the Philokalia was meant for monastic renewal, once it was published and began to be read by a larger Orthodox audience, it became part of a watershed moment in the history of Orthodox theology (10). Ã¢Â ÂœThe Philokalic movement provided a powerful resource for such return to Orthodox principles, as it had at its heart a programme for a renewed personal spirituality, based on the Jesus Prayer, and an emphasis on the importance ofÃ¢Â Â¦spiritual eldership that, at its best, made sure that the spiritual revival remained sound and healthyÃ¢Â Â• (11).The author weaves and walks his way through numerous Orthodox examples, most of whom were not theologically trained, and many who were not ordained clergy. Louth largely focuses Ã¢Â Âœon the presence of Orthodoxy in the West, and especially the influence of the Russians who found themselves in Paris after their expulsion from Russia in 1922Ã¢Â Â• (282). He follows the trail which Ã¢Â Âœblossomed in the Russian Religious RenaissanceÃ¢Â Â• and found its way into Greece and beyond, because he sees this renewal, that was marked out by the publication of the Philokalia, as representing Ã¢Â Âœall that is best in Orthodox theology over the last two centuriesÃ¢Â Â• (333).Ã¢Â ÂœModern Orthodox ThinkersÃ¢Â Â• snakes its way through the life stories of a crowd of people. The Author begins with SolovÃ¢Â Â™ev and ends with Metropolitan Kallistos, bringing along a troop of others such as Florensky, Bulgakov, Berdyaev, Florovsky, Mother Maria, Staniloae, Popovic, Evdokimov, Meyendorff, Schmemann, Vasileios, Zizioulas, Romanides, Sherrard, Koutroubis, Yannaras, Ramfos, Behr-Sigel, Clement, Mother Thekla, Silouan, Sophrony, and MenÃ¢Â Â™. Each chapter gives just enough biographical data to help the reader feel informed about the particular person being discussed, and then the sample aspects of how the Philokalia worked into and out of that persons experience are graciously opened up and worked through. It appears to me that the author is fair in his approach and judicious in his analysis. Some of the

subjects that are covered with quite a bit of regularity are Sophiology, apophatic theology over and above the kataphatic, starets and the starchestvo, the Jesus Prayer, Gregory Palamis, palamism and neo-palamism, theosis, and monasticism. But always the distinctive thread sown into the fabric of this book is the Philokalia and that Ã¢Â Âœtheology is not concerned with concepts, though it makes use of them, but concerned with engagement with GodÃ¢Â Â• (138).Louth is skillful in translating concepts and ideas that may be foreign to the non-Orthodox reader, while keeping the flow of the book from stalling. Not only was Ã¢Â ÂœModern Orthodox ThinkersÃ¢Â Â• helpful to me in pointing out some of the unique ways Orthodoxy views the Christian faith, but it also pulled together the historical developments of the Orthodox Church in America and gave me a richer understanding of several of the Orthodox writers I have read in the past. IÃ¢Â Â™m certain that many Orthodox readers will find the book a worthwhile read, and for American Protestants, this book may well give you better insight as to why Orthodoxy is finding a foothold in North America. Though I personally and confessionally donÃ¢Â Â™t agree with all of the theological conclusions of the book, nevertheless I highly recommend it.Thanks to IVP Academic for the free copy of Ã¢Â ÂœModern Orthodox ThinkersÃ¢Â Â• used for this revie

The best book of its kind that I've ever come across, I simply can't recommend it highly enough for those Orthodox who have been pushing themselves to deepen their knowledge and practice of the faith once delivered to the saints. It doesn't include all your favorites (or your not particularly favorites) -- there are no chapters on St. John of Kronstadt, Lev Gillet, Seraphim Rose, Elder Paisios, or Mother Gavrilia, to name names across the spectrum. But Andrew Louth does a superb job of guiding us along the path from the Philokalia to the present day, with the help of thinkers like St. Justin Popovich, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, Vladimir Lossky, Elder Sophrony, and Mother Thekla. You will be able to see where your parish fits into this rich heritage and where you yourself fall within it, according to the thinkers who have most influenced you (perhaps without you even knowing it) as your life unfolds in Orthodoxy. A most welcome feast of a book for those who are ready!

Instead of attempting to describe "orthodox theology" in the modern era, something Louth believes is problematic because there is no specifically orthodox theology, only individual orthodox thinkers who contribute to orthodox thought, Louth offers this work, originally a series of lectures, that introduce readers to significant orthodox thinkers. It's really a spectacular approach. Louth believes the Philokalia itself represents a major turning point, a return to the sources that distinguishes orthodox thought from more Western modalaties (in particular Idealism).But what is wonderful about

this book is the simplicity of the idea, spend a chapter on an individual thinker, and cast the net as wide as possible, including thinkers of all sorts, in particular lay theologians and non-professional theologians, who truly represent modern orthodox theology.This book will be a revelation to those unfamiliar with orthodoxy, and can serve as an excellent introduction. For those already familiar with the general scope of modern orthodox theology, this will be an essential work distinguishing and comparing the variety of orthodox theologians. Highly recommended!

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