

Eugen J. Pentiuć, *The Old Testament in Eastern Orthodox Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. xxi + 414. \$35.00, paper.

Pentiuć's volume outlines the reception and interpretation of the OT in the Eastern Orthodox Church. After defining Eastern Orthodoxy in territorial and chronological terms (pp. xi–xii), he sets out to correct the prevailing assumption that the LXX is its fixed OT text for which patristic interpretation alone is authoritative. In Pentiuć's view, the dearth of literature on the topic is in large measure to blame for this misconception. The book has two parts: Reception (Part 1) and Interpretation (Part 2).

In the first chapter Pentiuć discusses the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, the former of which he considers the book of "an alien religion" (p. 10, quoting Jon D. Levenson). Central to the Orthodox understanding of the Bible, however, is the resurrected person of Jesus, who prompts "reevaluation" of the OT (p. 11). Furthermore, the Orthodox understanding of Scripture is mediated by Tradition, discussed in chapter

4. Pentiuć walks through various ways that early Christianity “appropriated” the OT, namely, rejection (Marcionites, Gnostics, Manichaeans), “overestimation” (Jewish Christians, Pelagians), and supersessionism. He discusses how the latter potentially demonizes Jews, and advocates certain “softer forms” that acknowledge the complementary unity and diversity between the testaments that are linked by Christ (pp. 42, 50–61).

In chapter 2 Pentiuć discusses the text of the OT in Orthodox Tradition, noting the centrality, not exclusivity, of the LXX. To the contrary, the Orthodox Church has a “flexible” view of the text of Scripture (p. 63). Pentiuć provides a helpful overview of the transmission history of the HB (pp. 63–90), and then discusses how the LXX has always been “tacitly recognized” as inspired in Eastern Orthodoxy. While the LXX is the primary textual authority (p. 92), some debate arose in the seventeenth century among the Orthodox over the status of the Hebrew text, a discussion that was intertwined with issues of canon. Pentiuć expresses his personal desire for “more concrete steps in raising the awareness of the exegetical and theological value” of other OT texts such as the MT or SP (p. 100).

Chapter 3 treats issues of canon, beginning with the Greek word *kanōn* and then discussing factors involved in canonization, namely, authorship, cataloguing, and codex versus scroll formats. Pentiuć then treats views on canon from Sirach through nineteenth-century Orthodox confessions, closing the chapter with the topic of authority. There exists no unilateral mechanism for restricting the canon in Orthodoxy, an “openness” and “dialectical tension” between the wider and narrower canonical corpora being preferred over the Roman Catholic or Protestant views of canon (p. 134). Indeed, Eastern Orthodoxy understands Scripture not as a “source” of revelation, but its “means” or “channel” (p. 134).

The broad concept of Tradition is discussed in chapter 4. Pentiuć characterizes the Eastern Orthodox view as “Scripture (*with*) in Tradition,” the latter considered “the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church,” while the former constitutes “the Church’s pulsating heart” (p. 136). Scriptural interpretation properly occurs within the church, yet interpretation is not “fixed,” nor does the church have “some kind of interpretive monopoly over the living Word of the Bible,” according to Pentiuć (p. 137). Rather, the Eastern Orthodox Church continually “interacts” with Scripture in community and thereby maintains Tradition. Pentiuć describes Orthodox ecclesiology, and how the fathers’ defense of apostolic teaching against heresy became the task of the whole body of the church in the form of Tradition. He finally defines Tradition as “the ‘living connection’ of believers with the historical and eschatological ‘fullness of experience,’ uniting them both with God and with fellow believers across time within a single community” (p. 143). Orthodox Tradition has been codified over the centuries while retaining a “certain freedom, flexibility, and open-endedness,” as emphasis falls upon praxis rather than creed (p. 155). The elements of the codified Tradition include Scripture, liturgy and ritual, creeds, the lives of saints, the writings of the Apostolic and Desert Fathers, iconography, and “symbolic books” (p. 156). After stating that the notion of biblical *authority* is a “modern construal” (p. 158), Pentiuć affirms the *centrality* of Scripture in Orthodoxy, which, while governing Tradition, does “not explain so much as offer a lavish array of ways of thinking and doing,” “at times posing more questions than answers” (p. 166).

Chapter 4 acts as a theoretical framework for Part 2 of the book, which goes on to discuss in three successive chapters the discursive, aural, and visual aspects of Eastern Orthodox interpretation. Pentiuć offers in chapter 5 an overview and samples of patristic assumptions in OT exegesis, and a helpful discussion of the misconstrued boundaries between the interpretive strategies of Alexandria and Antioch. Chapters 6 and 7 go on to offer a fascinating discussion and illustration of the liturgical calendar, texts, hymns, iconography, and monuments of Eastern Orthodoxy too detailed for adequate summary here.

Reformed readers will naturally find points of disagreement with Orthodox views of Scripture. For example, Pentiuć considers it a “paradox” that the Bible contains the writing of a “different religion,” namely, Judaism (p. xiii; cf. p. 53). Aside from the potential anachronism involved in this claim, it is a major departure from a Reformed understanding of the OT. Pentiuć is also reluctant to allow Christian interpretation any prescriptivity for the OT, lest it become harshly supersessionist or triumphalistic. While his caution is well-taken, Pentiuć goes too far when he apparently criticizes those who hold that Jews ought to convert to the Christian faith (p. 39). Finally, while Pentiuć says that Scripture’s “preeminence” has never been questioned in Eastern Orthodoxy (p. 161), he also affirms that Tradition is not “a secondary revelatory source” (p. 162). How something can be not secondary yet not preeminent is unclear.

Elsewhere Pentiuć states that “the Septuagint was not the Scripture that Jesus and his immediate disciples knew” (p. 70). But this claim is puzzling since the Isaiah text that Luke records Jesus reading in Luke 4:18-19 follows the LXX. Furthermore, a few pages later Pentiuć observes that LXX manuscripts among the Dead Sea Scrolls indicates their use “by Greek-speaking Palestinian Jews prior to the rise of Christianity” (p. 77). Finally, Pentiuć seems to lose focus on the OT in Eastern Orthodoxy in chapters 4 and 5, where he broadens his discussion to hermeneutics. Yet for this reason, the book is also a helpful discussion of Eastern Orthodoxy in general, and in that way Pentiuć achieves his aims for the book. Those readers looking for a fuller understanding of this significant branch of Christian history will certainly benefit from Pentiuć’s volume.

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