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Pentecostal Orthodoxy
Toward an Ecumenism of the Spirit

September 6, 2022 | \$24, 192 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0090-8

In this manifesto of sorts, Bishop Emilio Alvarez introduces the phenomenon of Pentecostals returning to the ancient, creedal Christian faith, and extends the project of paleo-orthodox ressourcement to include orthodox expressions within Pentecostalism, particularly in his own Afro-Latino Pentecostal movement.

Reconstructing Foundations

Since 1979, Thomas Oden has used the term *paleo-orthodoxy* to describe “an orthodoxy that holds steadfast to classic consensual teaching, in order to make it clear that the ancient consensus of faith is starkly distinguishable from neo-orthodoxy. The ‘paleo’ stratum of orthodoxy is its oldest layer. For Christians this means that which is apostolic and patristic.” Paleo-orthodoxy, or “ancient correct belief,” refers to the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Protestant theological movement that sees the essentials of Christian theology in the consensual understanding of the faith as displayed within Christianity’s first five centuries, the first seven ecumenical councils, and the writings of the church fathers before the Great Schism. As a theological movement, it looks to critique the liberal rationalism and subjectivity of Christian modernity and to answer the questions of Christian postmodernity by recovering classical Christianity. John C. Peckham writes that paleo-orthodoxy looks to “encourage Protestantism (especially evangelicalism) to retrieve the orthodox consensus of Christianity, particularly that of the patristic tradition.”

The paleo-orthodox movement, along with its expressions (evangelical orthodoxy, convergence worship, ancient-future faith, Pentecostal orthodoxy), most commonly takes a communitarian approach to theology. Similar to the canonical approach, the communitarian approach sees the canon of Scripture as authoritative, yet emphasizes the authority of the Christian community in adopting what Peckham calls a “community-determined extracanonical rule of faith or other normative interpreter for theological doctrine.” An extracanonical normative interpreter is a way of interpreting Scripture and developing the authority of doctrine away from a solely scriptural (*sola Scriptura*) approach. It argues that community can also have a decisive say in the interpretation of Scripture and in developing authoritative doctrine.

This fact is significant for paleo-orthodox segments within Protestantism, since a community-determined extracanonical normative interpreter represents one way of thinking about a recovery of an ancient consensual method of interpreting Scripture. Roman Catholicism’s communitarian approach to theological method, for example, involves its magisterium (teaching office) as its extracanonical normative interpreter, while Eastern Orthodoxy adheres to what it has come to know as “the rule of faith,” which is a symbiotic relationship between the church, Scripture, and the apostolic tradition.

In Protestant postliberal renewal movements such as paleo-orthodoxy, extracanonical normative interpreters also make meaning within the practices and faith of a believing community. Paleo-orthodoxy, in particular, adopts the Vincent of Lérins’s rule of faith—*ubique, semper, omnibus* (everywhere, always and by all)—as its guide toward its consensual and Spirit-guided discernment of Scripture. The Vincentian rule, according to Oden, is the “decisive text for orthodox ancient ecumenical method,” because agreement at all three levels (that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all) “assures reliable truth.” Oden’s reliance on the Vincentian rule for the recovery of classical consensual Christianity is shared by many High-Church Anglicans, and within Methodism (Pentecostalism’s direct antecedent) John Wesley himself was influenced heavily by the Vincentian rule.

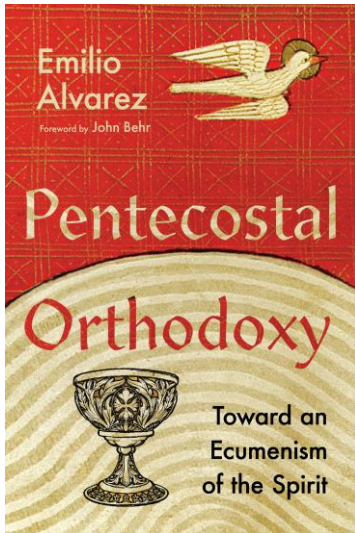
While teaching at Drew University, Oden was challenged to study the classical writers of the Christian tradition by his Jewish mentor, Will Herberg. This led Oden to have what he describes as a radical “change of heart” regarding the importance of patristic intervention within modern and postmodern theology. Oden says, “Holding one finger up, looking straight at me with fury in his eyes, [Herberg] said, ‘You will remain theologically uneducated until you study carefully Athanasius, Augustine and Aquinas.’”



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It was Oden who coined the term *paleo-orthodoxy*, and in making the distinction between neo-orthodoxy and paleo-orthodoxy he remarks, "Since 1979 I have used the term paleo-orthodoxy for the orthodoxy that holds steadfast to classic consensual teaching, in order to make it clear that the ancient consensus of faith is starkly distinguishable from neo-orthodoxy." For Oden orthodoxy is defined as "nothing more or less than the ancient consensual tradition of Spirit guided discernment of Scripture," which consists of the "integrated biblical teaching as interpreted in its most consensual classic period."

Oden sees paleo-orthodoxy as a renewal movement emblematic of a new ecumenical reality that is a work of the Holy Spirit grounded in a personal faith in Jesus Christ. This movement can take a number of forms (Pentecostal, Catholic, Orthodox, or charismatic) and represents "a very deliberate, intentional ecumenizing of renewal movements." In speaking of the terms *renewing church*, *renewing Christians*, and *renewing Christianity*, Oden states that all "refer to a single movement that is full of vitality and touched with many features of spontaneity, charisma, and inspiration." Further, the term *movement* "does not yield easily to being described as a static object or an inert standing entity. . . . If it were not moving and changing it would not be a movement." Oden's extensive theological body of work continues to inspire innovative and creative ways in which Protestants can think about the recovery of the Great Tradition.

Besides Oden, the most prominent contributor to the paleo-orthodox movement has been Robert Webber. In 1965 Webber, a Baptist fundamentalist, underwent a transformative shift in theological and ecclesiological thinking that ultimately led to his 1972 decision to enter the Episcopal Church. Fifteen years after Newbigin's *Household of God* and almost in parallel with Thomas Oden's work, Webber went on to chair the Chicago Call Conference, an appeal to evangelicals to recover an orthodox continuity with historic Christianity. As professor of theology at Wheaton College, Webber held a strong conviction that evangelicalism suffered from a reductionism in regard to historic faith and practice and thus had hoped that the Chicago Call would help "to restore a sense of historical awareness among evangelicals."

As a distinguished evangelical scholar and former professor of theology at Wheaton College, Webber is credited with coining the phrase "ancient-future." In calling for an evangelical appreciation of the historic Christian calendar, Webber remarks, "The road to the future runs through the past." He valued a recovery of the Great Tradition among Protestantism, arguing that a return to classical consensual Christian truth possesses the power to speak to a postmodern world dissatisfied with the modern version of evangelical faith and with the current innovations that have no connection with the past.

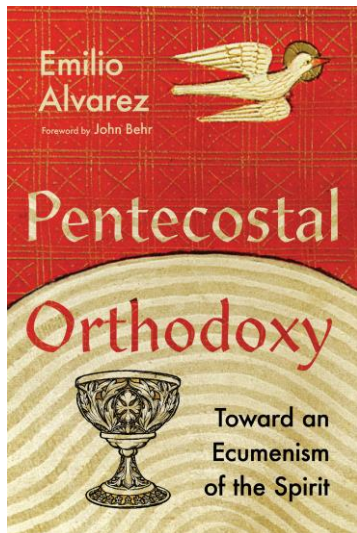
—Taken from chapter one, "Reconstructing Foundations"



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Emilio Alvarez (PhD, Fordham University) is the presiding bishop of the Union of Charismatic Orthodox Churches, a communion that embraces the one holy, catholic, apostolic tradition. He is also rector of The Cathedral at The Gathering Place in Rochester, New York, and is currently pursuing a second PhD at Aberdeen University.

Orthodox Expressions Within Pentecostalism

"The emergence of modern Pentecostalism at Azusa Street promised an ecumenism of the church that cut across the color line but which fulfillment has been derailed in North America at least by the history of racism in this country. The emergence of a 'Pentecostal orthodoxy' over the last fifty years—catalyzed vigorously by the Chicago Call (to evangelicals in 1977), the paleo-orthodox movement (Thomas Oden), ancient-future Christianity (Robert Webber), and other initiatives—promises an even more authentically charismatic and ever more radically renewed ecumenism of the Spirit that binds together not just those from every nation under heaven but also churches across the last two millennia of African, Orthodox, Catholic, and Reformation/Anglican traditions! Come Holy Spirit—be poured out again on all peoples, languages, and cultures/ethnicities for the twenty-first-century church's witness!"

—**Amos Yong**, professor of theology and mission at Fuller Seminary

"*Pentecostal Orthodoxy* opens a new chapter in ecumenism, Pentecostalism, and world Christianity. The breadth and depth of its scholarship is extraordinary. With integrity and passion, Emilio Alvarez has demonstrated that an authentic recovery of the Great Tradition opens up the renewing power of the Spirit for all streams of Christian faith today."

—**Dale T. Irvin**, professor of world Christianity at New School of Biblical Theology and adjunct in theology and religious studies at Georgetown University

"Let's be honest, when most people think of Pentecostals, orthodoxy is not the first thing that comes to mind. For many of us, these words represent a paradox. However, as Bishop Emilio Alvarez successfully demonstrates, orthodoxy and Pentecostalism do belong together. He documents a movement where the Spirit is leading thousands of Pentecostals to defy this false dichotomy and rediscover the Great Tradition for today. Alvarez is on the forefront of this movement and has written an essential manifesto for the church, calling for Pentecostals to embrace Christian orthodoxy. More than that, he paints a hopeful picture of the future of the church as one that is historically rooted and modern; orthodox and gracious; unified and diverse; sacramental and open to the Spirit. This book is a major resource for anyone wanting to know about one of the most exciting things that the Spirit is doing in the church today."

—**Winfield Bevins**, author of *Liturgical Mission: The Work of the People for the Sake of the World*

"During these times when 'truth is on a scaffold and wrong is on the throne,' Bishop Alvarez becomes the voice in this wilderness. He crowbars the mind with terminology such as Pentecostal orthodoxy, ecumenism of the Spirit, and surely, the recovery of the Great Tradition. This work is nothing short of a revival road map. Dr. Alvarez, who once preached revivals in local churches, now pens revivals with the same passion necessary for the salvation of 'the saved.' Here, like Jacob, the bishop re-digs old wells. Hallelujah!"

—**Johnny Ray Youngblood**, pastor of Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church in Brooklyn, New York

"In *Pentecostal Orthodoxy*, Emilio Alvarez surprises the reader with how the Great Tradition has been engaged by the African Orthodox Church and the Church of God in Christ. Then he creatively instructs us on the value of being taught by the Great Tradition itself. This stellar book models a generative form of ecumenical engagement."

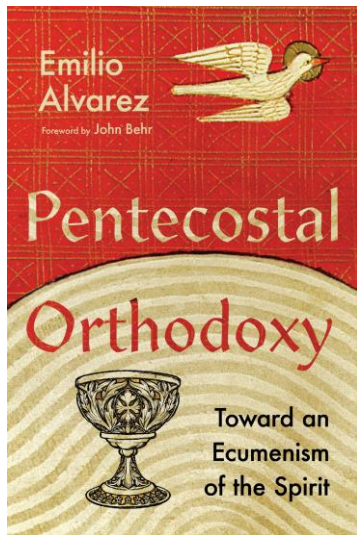
—**David D. Daniels**, Henry Winters Luce Professor of World Christianity at McCormick Theological Seminary



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“Sankofa teaches that we must go back to our roots in order to move ahead. That is, we should reach back and gather the best of what our past has to teach us so we can achieve our full potential as we go forward. In *Pentecostal Orthodoxy* Dr. Alvarez is calling Afro American Latino Pentecostals to proudly stand on the shoulders of our foreparents. I sincerely recommend this edition to be both read and studied by those who wish to understand the Great Tradition within the Holiness Pentecostal evolution of the church. Let us consider going back to our roots of the Great Tradition so as to better move forward to achieve a spiritually empowered future of the Lord’s church.”

—**David M. Copeland**, chairman of the board of the Joint College of African American Pentecostal Bishops

“The vital and often Pentecostal faith of immigrant churches holds much promise for the future renewal of the US church. Such hope, however, may become sabotaged by the ticking time bomb of incomplete theology. Alvarez’s framework of Pentecostal orthodoxy offers a healthy path forward.”

—**Robert Chao Romero**, associate professor in the Departments of Chicana/o Studies and Asian American Studies at the University of California at Los Angeles, author of *Brown Church*

“*Pentecostal Orthodoxy* is the first scholarly book of its kind and a much-needed addition to the growing canon of Pentecostal studies. With conviction and accessibility, *Pentecostal Orthodoxy* wrestles with what it means to love Christ and the church. Throughout, Bishop Alvarez proves that he is not only a premier intellectual thought leader of Pentecostal orthodoxy but also a spiritual guide. The text, therefore, is his formal invitation for all of us to sit, think, and pray with him about what it would mean if the church were truly one, holy, and catholic.”

—**Dara Coleby Delgado**, assistant professor of religious studies and Black studies at Allegheny College

“The Pentecostal movement needs more works like this. Alvarez adroitly navigates the thorny terrain in which contemporary Black Pentecostalism finds itself as it moves away from fundamentalist evangelical thinking ‘toward more liturgical, sacramental, and creedal forms of Christianity.’ Alvarez presents contemporary faith leaders with important questions for the future: Are Christianity and orthodoxy commensurate, in view of the persistence of categorical racism? Is orthodoxy a form of theological reasoning that can liberate Black Pentecostals from deep-seated racism that persists in Western Christian culture? And what are the ramifications of Alvarez’s claims for organizations that adhere to an episcopal polity like the Joint College of African American Pentecostal Bishops? You will have to purchase your own copy to find out. I recommend this book for pastors and scholars, church leaders and lay people.”

—**Donald Hilliard Jr.**, senior pastor of Cathedral International, Perth Amboy, New Jersey

“*Pentecostal Orthodoxy* is a pioneering and provocative work of scholarship and renewing spirituality! As a pioneering work it breaks new ground by mapping and introducing the emerging Spirit-led growth of the ‘ecumenism of the Spirit’ among the Pentecostal church and beyond—one that is richly sourced by Eastern Orthodoxy. As a provocative work it challenges Pentecostals to embrace orthodoxy as a Spirit-led grassroots movement that coheres well with Pentecostal spirituality. This Pentecostal orthodoxy is one that seeks to be informed, formed, and transformed by the Great Tradition, with its newly found profundity in the liturgical and sacramental. This book should be required reading for all persons (Pentecostal or not) interested in the life and mission of the one church.”

—**Eldin Villafañe**, distinguished senior professor emeritus of Christian social ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary



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