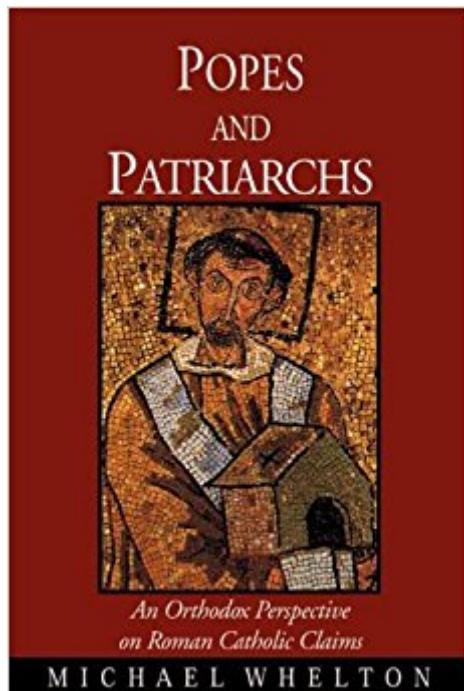


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Popes And Patriarchs: An Orthodox Perspective On Roman Catholic Claims



Synopsis

For any dialogue between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches to be fruitful, we must first understand our differences. *Popes and Patriarchs* covers some of the distinctives in theology and worldview that separate the churches of the East from those of the West, focusing primarily on the claims of papal supremacy. Author Michael Whelton, a convert from Catholicism to Orthodoxy, discusses some of the theological and historical issues that led him to explore the teachings of the Orthodox Church, including the doctrine of original sin, the influence of Medieval scholastic thought on the Western Church, and the modern trend toward evolutionary Christianity. Part II examines in depth the true attitude of the early Eastern saints of the Church toward the papacy, an attitude radically different from that frequently attributed to them by Roman Catholic apologists. A final chapter is devoted to typical questions Roman Catholics raise about the Orthodox Church, including a comprehensive discussion of divorce and remarriage.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Michael Whelton's rather short book, copyright 2006, which can be read in one day, is really 3 separate pieces strung together. The first part, Chapters 1-3, covers his spiritual journey: baptized Anglican in England to becoming Roman Catholic (RC) in Canada in 1961, to becoming Eastern Orthodox (EO) in 1995. The longest part, Chpts 4-9, covers his discussion about church history, the papacy, and the relationship of Roman Catholicism to Eastern Orthodoxy. The last and shortest part, Chpt 10, covers some "FAQ" about Roman Catholicism (e.g., annulments). I was interested in

the book primarily because I, too, am a convert from Roman Catholicism to Orthodoxy. I've spent half my life as an RC (24 years) and the other half as an EO (another 24 years). Having read some RC books which describe conversions to Rome, I was glad to see the counterpart, so I did enjoy the first 3 chpts, which are pretty personal and subjective. This review is not over whether Whelton "makes" his case. Rather, the review is on how he fails to do justice to attempting to "make" his case. First and foremost, Whelton is essentially an amateur historian and an amateur theologian. There is no sign of any academic expertise or training on the subjects. He doesn't state whether he knows any ancient languages, esp. Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, that help historians and theologians make better judgements about the subjects at hand. If he cannot read and study the original documents in their original languages, then he is at a most severe disadvantage when being forced to rely on the translations and opinions of others. Critically, he relies most heavily on secondary sources, with few citations from primary sources .

[Speaking several years later, in August 2015, I still agree with most of what I wrote here, but my thoughts about Roman Catholicism have developed significantly. My tone was a little nasty, and I don't stand by that. But I'm too lazy to revise it.] Michael Whelton's book comes at an opportune time. Protestants are beginning to realize that their tradition has no roots- and they are seeking roots the ancient Christian communions. All of these communions make a claim to be the unique Church of Christ, outside of which salvation is normatively impossible (though some authors may try to dumb down this doctrine). Seeking Protestants come across primarily two claimants to this position- the Orthodox Catholic Church and the Roman Papal Church (known informally as the Roman 'Catholic' Church). The defining issue upon which all other issues stand is the claim by the Bishop of Rome to be, by divine right, the sole successor of St Peter and, by virtue of that succession, to have universal, supreme, and immediate (that is, without being mediated by other bishops) jurisdiction over every local Church. If this doctrine is correct and can be demonstrated from the history of the ancient Church, then the Roman Papal Church is properly known as the Catholic Church. If, however, this claim is proven to be a figment of the imagination, based on a misreading of the history of the Church, then it is the Orthodox Church which alone can lay claim to being the Catholic Church. Mr. Whelton, a former Roman Catholic himself, sets out to prove the latter. In this mission he is partially successful. I say "partially" because the writings of Papal apologists aiming to prove the former claim are abundant and widely available.

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