

A Brief List of Orthodox Books in English for Lay People

It is a dangerous thing to read, for the results might be mistaken for true knowledge. The goal of the Orthodox life, as St. Seraphim reminds us, is not the acquisition of facts, but of the Holy Spirit. Reading can be one means to this end, and so a list of books is hereby offered. But as we read, we must be clear that the goal is not to stuff facts into our heads, but to transform our hearts. That is, we must always strive to take practical benefit from our reading, and must read knowing that we will be held accountable on the Last Day for the light received. As the Lord Jesus said, “To whom much is given, of him much is required (Lk. 12:48). Reading books is a means of acquiring light and spiritual insight—and having acquired it, we will be held responsible for at least beginning to apply it in our lives.

The learning of facts (that is, scholarly pursuits) is a part of the Christian life, and some are called to specialize in it, and to become scholars. Such people must constantly remember, however, that scholarliness is not sanctity, and if scholariness is accompanied by pride in one’s accomplishments, it may even be a barrier to sanctity. At the end of the day it is still true that God has revealed the Kingdom to babes (Lk. 10:21), and that humility is indispensable in the Christian life. St. Augustine was converted to Christ when he heard a child chanting “Take up and read!” We also may take up and read, but if we must read with an adult head, we must also hear with a child’s heart. For only in this way will we enter the Kingdom of God (Mk. 10:15).

--Archpriest Lawrence R. Farley

Note: the following lists are not meant to form the basis of an Orthodox library; they are not lists of “must have” books, or of indispensable volumes. They are simply books which should prove helpful to the average non-scholarly reader at various stages of his Orthodox journey. It is taken for granted that the reading of Scripture is the cornerstone of any Christian reading, and that what is read is discussed with wiser and more experienced Christian guides (such as the parish priest).

Resources for Enquirers

Ware, Bishop Kallistos, The Orthodox Church, Penguin Books.
Mathews-Green, Frederica, Facing East, Harper Books.
Mathews-Green, Frederica, At the Corner of East and Now, Tarcher/Putnam.
Farley, Donna, Seasons of Grace, Conciliar Press.
Coniaris, Anthony, Introducing the Orthodox Church, Light and Life Press.
AGAIN Magazine, Conciliar Press.
The Handmaiden Journal, Conciliar Press.

Resources for Catechumens

Ware, Bishop Kallistos, The Orthodox Way, SVS Press.
Schmemmann, Alexander, For the Life of the World, SVS Press.
Carlton, Clark, The Truth, Regina Press.
Hopko, Thomas, The Orthodox Faith, vols. 1-4, OCA-DRE.
Schmemmann, Alexander, Great Lent, SVS Press.
Schmemmann, Alexander, Of Water and the Spirit, SVS Press.
Farley, Lawrence, A Daily Calendar of Saints, Light and Life Press.
Aslanoff, Catherine, The Incarnate God, vols. 1-2, SVS Press.

Resources for the Faithful

Bloom, Anthony, Living Prayer, Libra Books.

Bloom, Anthony, School for Prayer, Libra Books.

Wybrew, Hugh, The Orthodox Liturgy, SPCK.

Schmemmann, Alexander, The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy, SVS Press.

Meyendorff, John, Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective, SVS Press.

Bajis, Jordan, Common Ground, Light and Life Press.

Clendenin, Daniel. ed., Eastern Orthodox Theology: a Contemporary Reader, Baker Books.

Payne, Robert, The Fathers of the Eastern Church, Dorset Press.

Payne, Robert, The Fathers of the Western Church, Dorset Press.

Ward, Benedicta, tr., Sayings of the Desert Fathers, Cistercian Press.

Lossky, Vladimir, The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church, SVS Press.

Anon., The Way of the Pilgrim, SVS Press.

The Fathers are an indispensable part of one's spiritual reading. Easily accessible collections are:

The Ladder of Divine Ascent, as well as others in the *Classics of Western Spirituality* series.

The Apostolic Fathers, Baker Books.

The Philokalia: the Complete Text, Faber and Faber.

Also, the series on the Fathers published by SVS Press (such as St. John Chrysostom, On Wealth and Poverty).