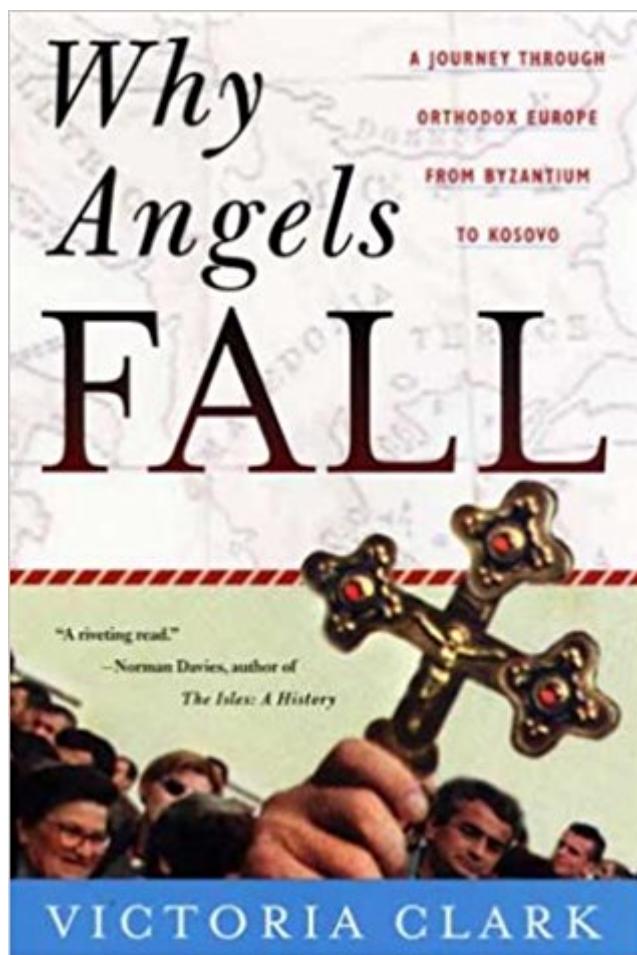


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Why Angels Fall: A Journey Through Orthodox Europe From Byzantium To Kosovo



Synopsis

Victoria Clark has the mind of a historian and the eye for detail possessed by the best novelists. In *Why Angels Fall*, she combines her gifts to give the reader a look at the sometimes mysterious world of Eastern Europe's Orthodox church. Majestic in their gilt encrusted robes and mitres, the Orthodox churchmen of Europe do convey a mysterious and arcane image. Combining history with contemporary detail, Clark traces the Orthodox faith through the embattled and fading world of late Byzantium to the present. Journeying through Greece, Russia, Macedonia, Romania, Cyprus, and the former Yugoslavia, Clark has met monks, nuns, bishops, and archbishops. Within a religion that traditionally has not accorded full status to women, Clark visits places that women have rarely been allowed to visit and asks questions that women have never before asked. Clark reveals an altogether different but equally engaging European legacy of worship with far-reaching consequences.

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Customer Reviews

Victoria Clark traveled across most of Eastern Europe to write *Why Angels Fall*. Having worked for six years as a journalist in Romania, the former Yugoslavia, and Russia, Clark was fascinated by the Eastern Orthodox churches and keen to unravel their histories and beliefs. To do so, she journeyed from Mount Athos, to Serbia, Macedonia, Greece, Romania, Russia, Cyprus, and finally Istanbul, interviewing clergy and other believers. We're treated to a series of vivid cameos, a few of whose subjects glow almost visibly with holiness, a few terrify, and many show qualities rare and needed in the West. As Clark puts it, after the ancient split between eastern and western

Christianity, "each side lost something it could not happily do without ... at the risk of oversimplifying for the sake of clarity, western Christendom can be said to have lost its heart, eastern Christendom its mind." Her keenness to explain Orthodoxy to Westerners stems from a fear that the continent is in the process of fracturing along a 1,000-year-old fault line, between the Catholic and Protestant west and the Orthodox east. The book combines high-quality, highly readable travel writing with a powerful mix of politics and religion. Most of all, perhaps, it demonstrates the power of history, and of different peoples' conflicting versions of history. Again and again, Clark finds the present in the grip of the past. In Serbia, for example, she cannot escape the legends surrounding the destruction of the Serbs' medieval empire in 1389, and the death of the venerated Prince Lazar: "the battle of Kosovo's interruption of Serbia's golden greatness has become a cataclysm to rival man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden in the minds of Serbs.... Prince Lazar is the key to understanding the Serbs' deep conviction that, however many wars they initiate, they remain a nation of victims and martyrs." --David Pickering, .co.uk

To bring us this vivid and sensitive portrait of Eastern Europe's Orthodox church, journalist Clark (London Observer) traveled widely within its key geographical regions (the former Yugoslavia, Greece, Romania, Russia, Cyprus, and Turkey) and conducted extensive interviews with various levels of the church hierarchy. The author, who has reported on the Croatian, Bosnian, and Chechen wars, focuses upon the historical events that have greatly influenced the development of the Orthodox Church, from its origins in the 1054 schism between the churches of Rome and Constantinople, through centuries of Ottoman Muslim rule, to the more recent decades of modern communism leading up to the present. While Clark does admit to offering only a sketchy treatment of Bulgaria, Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus, and Moldavia owing to a lack of space, this unevenness does not detract from the importance of the work. Recommended for academic and theological libraries. DMichael W. Ellis, Ellenville P.L., NY Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Ms Clark sets out on a journey through Orthodox lands trying to find out why (as she has decided beforehand, and keeps accumulating evidence for) Orthodox people are so backward and narrow-minded and petty (downright "Byzantine") despite what she senses is their having preserved a precious tradition of spirituality that is largely lost in the West. But she never comes to understand the first thing about the spirituality she claims to admire because she is so obsessed with seeking out (often through baiting her interlocutors) seemingly narrow-minded or superstitious beliefs and having her Western liberal sensibilities shocked! just shocked! by them. And in doing so,

Clark merely retraces tired old pathways of Western bigotry that were already shopworn by the time of Gibbon. Imagine a cluster of men's monasteries that is restricted to men! How backward! But the reader might consider an "enlightened" Western journalist who went instead to an Islamic or Hindu country, eager to lob stones at anyone who dares to offend beliefs or practices fashionable among the elites of London or New York, and totally lacking in any sensitivity as to why these peoples may do things a bit differently. Surely they would be dismissed as utterly narrow and bigoted themselves. But somehow, it's always different with Eastern Christians. I have personally visited many of the places to which she travels and met a good number of the people she interviews. It is sad to think of what she could have learned had she set out with an open mind. Unfortunately, like all malicious, gossipy writing this book tantalizes the baser instincts of the reader. (Much more enticing to read page after page about Rasputin, an utterly failed monk of a century ago, than to try to understand the rich complexities of present-day Russian monasticism from within.) Thus, the reader who wants to understand anything serious about Orthodox culture and spirituality is wasting his or her time here. Try Markides "Mountain of Silence," or Dalrymple's "From the Holy Mountain." But if you are in search of salacious gossip that will make you feel snug and secure in your politically correct citadel, you will no doubt find this book to be quite satisfying.

Substance of manuscript proved more informational than expected.

Why Angels Fall fills an important gap in the Western literature about Orthodoxy-- the unvarnished examination of the current status of the Orthodox world. Much like the West's view of Islam, we are rarely presented with such a portrait. We see the "best foot" put forward by these other civilizations and in our self-destructive impulse, the worst about ourselves. This is reflected not only in our media but in our history and church history texts. The view of Orthodoxy presented there is often shallow and rosy, filling in no color of the broad worldview differences which make our civilizations different--not just an historical creedal disagreement. Here we learn, for example, about the Serbian perspective of the Balkan wars, which is quite different than the one we are accustomed to. Understanding, then, the information presented here, explains a lot more about Russian, Serbian, and other Orthodox policy orientations than we might really have the courage to face and is a nice complement to those who acknowledge the "Clash of Civilizations" posited by Harvard Political Scientist, Samuel P. Huntington. Only by understanding these other Civilizations from within, as Clark attempts to help us do, can we really objectively see it and our role in it from the West. About the book itself then, Clark has chapters on the major flashpoints of the Orthodox world including the

Balkans, Greece, Russia, etc. Each chapter gives a light historical treatment in the context of relevant contemporary interviews and encounters. It's difficult to overstate how helpful this is--if only all history were given in context of contemporary worldview significance, maybe we'd understand it. Clark's perspective is definitely that of a secularist. Many other reviews identify this as purely negative, but for me, this was actually helpful because she was more of an outside observer with a stated bias, as opposed to an Eastern or Western church historian with political constraints.

Thanks for sharing realistic view of modern orthodox life that unfortunately is so far from early Church life. Hopefully accounts like these will wake up those bought into the false narrative that modern orthodoxy is perfect and above all else and call us to humbly repent and begin imitating the life of Christ as the early orthodox catholic faithful Bible believing Christian Church did so often!

I am Orthodox, and this Englishwoman is a good writer. I liked it, and she does not hide her bias. Good for her. Read it - altho I sure as "H" wouldn't pay the US\$50+ they want for it new! LORD HAVE MERCY indeed!

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