

Stephen De Young, *The Religion of the Apostles: Orthodox Christianity in the First Century*, Ancient Faith Publishing, 2021, 320 p.

Stephen De Young serves as the pastor at the Archangel Gabriel Orthodox Church (Antiochian) in Lafayette, Louisiana. This father studied and had received a PhD concerning Biblical Studies from Amridge University, also being the main host in his podcast called *The Whole Counsel of God* and a co-host of the podcast called *Lord of Spirits* which is on Ancient Faith Radio. He wrote another book by the name of *The Whole Counsel Blog* on a website called *Ancient Faith Ministries*. The author has been teaching the Holy Bible for several years now. In his teaching, he takes current ideas in biblical scholarship, and he explains these ideas to laymen in order to make both of these ideas and the Scriptures more accessible. But his book *The Religion of the Apostles*, delves into the contemporary Orthodox Christian Church concerning the religious life of the Apostles, it being continued in the lives of the people of God ever since the dawn of creation. He also examines the cultures and beliefs of the community which is apostolic, and sheds light on the foundational aspects of Christianity as it emerged since the first century.

In the first chapter, the author writes about the divine Father and Son, delving into divine topics such as the angel of the Lord, the Word of the Lord, the Wisdom of God, the Son of Man, the body of God, Jesus Christ as Yahweh in the New Testament, the Divine Christ in the Gospels, Saint Paul's divine Christ, the Divine Christ in the General Epistles, and Christ in the Apocalypse. Part one speaks of the Godhead, beginning with the topic of the Divine Father and Son, with the very first sentence speaking of how, in the Christian world, there is an "*assumed narrative regarding the "development" of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity within Christianity.*" The author emphasizes the way how the people of the Old Testament believed that God does in fact exist, but He has only one person, clarifying how, through Christ's teaching and deeds, early Christians thought of Him as divine in a sense. Stephen De Young also explores how, in the next several centuries, the Christian beliefs evolved that He is truly God. He writes, "*the same rationale holds that belief in the Holy Spirit was an even later, albeit similar, development, bringing the Trinitarian doctrine of the fourth-century councils to maturity. Although this narrative is largely taken for granted, it is false.*" He then explains that the followers of the Old Testament believed that "the God of Israel existed in multiple hypostasis" and that word would translate to 'persons' in doctrinal statements that came later.

In the second chapter, the author speaks of the Spirit, Presence, and Name of God. He begins this chapter by saying, "*That Yahweh, the God of Israel had a second hypostasis was firmly entrenched in the*

religious life and experience of the Jewish people in the Second Temple period, not least because of their familiarity with the Holy Scriptures.” The author then elaborates that it was a subject that was debated much in the literature of the Second Temple. The Jewish people who rejected the fact that Jesus is the Messiah also came to reject the idea of “two powers in heaven” as the author calls it, in the entire second century. The author also underlines how significant the understanding of the Holy Apostles had of Jesus Christ as being the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy and the embodiment of the promises of God towards Israel. Central to their faith was the belief in the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus which served as the cornerstone of Christian doctrine and provided hope for the future.

In chapter three, entitled, “The Powers of the spiritual World,” De Young delves into Holy Scripture, using divine references like Exodus and Revelation to explain the presence of God and His surroundings, which the author claims, “*In whatever place God is, He is surrounded by His Divine Council and presides.*” He then explains that that is why God’s throne is “*depicted as a chariot.*” De Young also explains that God is called “the Most-High God” because, as he says, “*... although other spiritual beings exist and are called gods in the pages of the Scriptures, none of them are like Yahweh, the God of Israel.*” This explanation meticulously adheres to the divine providence and essence of God himself, since there are also no other gods before Him, and since He created the world and us. The author in chapter three also connects Baal as the devil, using Scriptural references like Ezekiel 28 to reinforce his carefully planned elaborations.

In the fourth chapter, entitled, “Spiritual Powers of Evil and Human Rebellion,” De Young explores the first eleven chapters of Genesis which speak of the creation of the world and humanity, the descent of man, the Flood of Noah, the “expulsion” from Paradise, and so forth. He particularly analyzes the context of Genesis three, which the author calls “*... A site of major theological focus, often touted as the chronicle of ‘the Fall’ of man.*” The Fall of man is labeled as the “*pivotal act of human disobedience to the law of God*” which, henceforth, has fallen under the punishment of God onto the entirety of humanity. This act of disobedience, known as the Original Sin, marks the moment of the fall of humanity. Due to their act, Adam and Eve had shared the experience of separation from God through their expulsion from heaven, or also known as the Garden of Eden. Consequently, they and us became aware of their nakedness and felt ashamed, and they also felt toil and hardship in their work, hence subjected then to their physical deaths.

In the fifth chapter called “the Saints in Glory,” the author starts the chapter by explaining how before Christ’s Incarnation, “*only certain human beings had limited direct encounters and the unseen world and demons.*” The author also explains the impact of humanity’s “sinful rebellion” against God had on

us, emphasizing the importance of the prophets (such as Enoch, Moses, and Elijah) in carrying out God's messages and signs by the process of standing before God Himself and through visions. He also offers the idea that "*In the Person of Christ, our humanity was joined forever to God, and everything changed.*" The author then reinforces this idea by stating that "*What previously only a select few had experienced became a possibility offered to everyone.*" This clearly rightfully praises the holiness and goodness of God by finally allowing Himself to be seen by everyone like one of their own people. And not only that, but it His Incarnation also meant the salvation of all, and this chapter emphasizes on this and the divinity of the saints as well.

Chapter six speaks of creation and chaos, which is also the chapter's name. Creation and chaos are concepts found in various religious and mythological traditions around the world, each with its own unique interpretations and significance. Creation refers to the process by which the world, the universe, and all living beings have been brought into existence. Different cultures have their own creation myths which elaborate and explain how the world came to be and often involve the actions of deities or supernatural forces. Creation stories can vary widely, ranging from accounts of a divine creator shaping the world from nothingness to narratives involving battles between gods or cosmic forces. The author explores these various stories by defining what it means to exist and analyzing being versus nothingness.

In conclusion, the religion of the apostles was characterized by devotion to Jesus Christ, adherence to his teachings, and the proclamation of the good news of salvation to all people. Through their efforts, Christianity spread rapidly throughout the Roman Empire and beyond, shaping the course of history. The apostles taught that salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ. They emphasized the importance of belief in Jesus' death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Stephen De Young explains and explores this topic extravaginally in each chapter of his book *the Religion of the Apostles*. It is a brilliant and insightful read, useful to any theologian, or anyone who wishes to embark on their religious journey.

Daniel SÍRBU