Reformed Calvinism and Eastern Orthodoxy
By W. J. Whitman

In recent years, many people have moved to the Orthodox faith from the Reformed Protestant community. And most of these converts had previously studied Calvinism, presuppositionalism, and theonomy. I have in mind such folks as Perry C. Robinson, Jay Dyer, and Frank Schaeffer. Why is it that Reformed Protestants, followers of John Calvin, Cornelius van Til, and Francis Schaeffer, are becoming Orthodox? I spent some time dealing with this question in a previous article, but this time I want to answer the question more briefly. What is the connection between Reformed (Calvinistic) Protestantism and Eastern Orthodoxy? The answer is quite simple: they are both anti-humanistic.

All worldviews, ideologies, and religions, with the exception of Calvinism and Orthodoxy, are types of humanism. These two schools of thought, on the other hand, are staunchly anti-humanist. This is the connection between them. Calvinism and Orthodoxy teach that God is the measure of all things—God is the standard. All non-Christian schools of thought (including the pseudo-Christian heresies) reject the God-centered approach of Christianity. According to the non-Christian traditions, “Man is the measure of all things.” (Protagoras) This is humanism, the idea that man is the standard by which we should judge everything—man determines what is good and what is bad ethically, man determines what is true and what is false epistemologically, and man is to be autonomous. Man does not need God’s help in order to reason rightly. In essence, man is already god-like and needs no regeneration or divine guidance in any sphere of life. For these non-Christians, whether or not God exists is totally irrelevant as far as ethics and philosophy are concerned. They hold that the natural man can autonomously reason his way to ultimate truths in the areas of ethics and epistemology—they believe that fallen man can know all manner of truth apart from God. They even hold that man can come to know ultimate metaphysical truth through his own autonomous cognitive faculties. In other words, the question of “Does God exist?” is a question that can be adequately answered through philosophical speculation and argumentation. This is the method of all non-Christian schools of thought, from paganism to the pseudo-Christian heresies of Arminianism and Roman Catholicism. The problem with this non-Christian methodology, which even many so-called “Christians” use, is that it does not logically prove the existence of the Christian God. In fact, it cannot possibly prove the existence of the God of Christianity because it presupposes that no
such God can possibly exist. I have thoroughly demonstrated this point in my article on *Augustinianism and Postmodernism*, where I argued that the pseudo-Christian heresies of Western “Christendom” are fundamentally at odds with true Christianity because they always follow the non-Christian method of humanism.

Calvinists and Orthodox Christians reject this *humanistic* approach. Christianity holds that man is fallen. Insofar as he is *fallen*, he is unable to reason properly. As I have said elsewhere:

> Although the natural man—the non-regenerate man—knows the natural law subconsciously, he does not abide by it and he does not always acknowledge it *because his fallen nature causes him to “suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”* (Romans 1:18)… Although unregenerate men have “the law written in their hearts,” they “suppress the truth in unrighteousness,” on account of which “their foolish hearts were darkened.” (Cf. Romans 1:18, 21; 2:15) So, although the natural man *does* know the natural law and the truth concerning God in one sense, he *does not* know it in another sense.

Since man is *fallen* and *sinful*, he must be born-again or *regenerated* by the Holy Spirit before he can reason rightly concerning anything related to ethics, metaphysics, or ultimate reality. Orthodoxy and Calvinism both teach this and they teach it *consistently*, whereas all other schools of thought reject this in theory and/or in practice.

This is the common ground between Orthodoxy and Calvinism. Unfortunately, however, Calvinism still has humanistic elements that it inherited from its mother, the Roman Catholic Church. The chief among these humanistic elements in Calvinism are the notion of God’s *absolute simplicity* and the *filioque* doctrine, which are based on the humanistic philosophical reasoning of Latin “theologians” and *not on God’s revelation*. Moreover, the Calvinist tends to be a humanist in practice insofar as he adheres to the Protestant doctrines of *sola scriptura* and the *perspicuity (i.e. clarity) of scripture*. In Reformed Protestant churches, each individual takes his Bible, reads it, and interprets it for himself; for the Calvinist holds that the Bible is clear and easy to understand. But in practice this means that each individual ends up interpreting the Bible for himself, and the ultimate criterion for truth becomes human reason. Thus the Calvinist lets humanism in through the back door!