"Blessed is the kingdom of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit," he is inviting us to enter "*kairos*," the eternal "now" timeless time, into the heavenlies in worship beholding through the open doors to the altar where Christ is enthroned. The icons on the walls are windows into heaven, with the saints and angels surrounding us like a great cloud of witnesses looking down on us as we all worship the Lord together. The main purpose of coming to an Orthodox Church is to worship God, to literally bow down before Him. That's the central part, not to listen to a lecture, i.e. a sermon, or to seek a "spiritual experience" feeling. You confess your faith according to the Nicene Creed in every liturgy. Better get used to liturgical worship now, you'll be doing it for all eternity in heaven – if you get there! So that's where we're at now, our final destination. No more "loosey-goosey" theology or worship for us. We have come home.

I've been developing a bibliography on Evangelicalism and Orthodoxy. You can access the bibliography I'm working on, as well as several files in PDF and MP3 format and lots of free literature, on my website at **https://agape-biblia.org/orthodoxy/** and **https://agape-biblia.org/literatura/**.

Your fellow-servant,

Robert Hosken

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(Available in booklet format at **https://agape-biblia.org/literatura/#homecoming**
or to read online at **https://discover-original-christianity.info/homecoming.htm**)

Our Homecoming

By Robert D. Hosken, M.Min., M.Th.S., D.Min.

Our journey to Orthodox Christianity that we began in the 1990s in Russia

Our Homecoming

by Dr. Robert D. Hosken

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Please allow me to tell you how my wife and I came to discover Original Christianity. For about six decades I have been concerned with the unity of the Christian faith and involved in the issue of religious freedom (or the lack of it) in what is now the former Soviet Union and its satellite countries. How can we bring these two seemingly opposing elements together?

Introduction

I am trained as a Russian translator, have a B.A. degree and some graduate work in Central and Eastern European Area Studies as well as earned Master of Theological Studies, and Master and Doctorate degrees in Christian Ministry. I also have a technical college degree in computer programming, so I know about 25 computer languages, and I have studied about 10 human languages. While my wife and I

together again and make it "jump." We can't simply select the parts that we like and discard what we don't agree with. We need to accept it as a whole, living organism, the Body of Christ Who is alive and present with us in the Church. Christianity isn't merely a collection of theological doctrines or philosophical propositions, it's *koinonia*-communion with the Living Christ in His Body, the Church.

Some Protestants have a liturgical form of worship and pictures of the saints on their walls or stained glass windows. Some Protestants emphasize the importance of personal faith while other Protestants stress the need for good works and social action. Some stress the idea that baptism and the Lord's Supper are more than "merely symbolic" – they are real acts of God's grace that play a role in our salvation. Some baptize infants and others only baptize teenagers and adults. Some baptize by immersion and others sprinkle – I was amazed when I saw an adult-size, in-the-floor baptistry in an Orthodox church in Russia! The Orthodox Church has all of the right stuff: the fullness of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 2:9-10) is to be found in "you" (plural, the assemblies of believers Paul was writing to), the one real, visible Church that Christ established 2,000 years ago. Did Orthodoxy borrow the idea of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist from the Roman Catholics, or Celtic Christianity from the Anglicans, or bowing down with your forehead to the floor from the Muslims, or liturgical worship from the Lutherans, or the doctrine of the Trinity from the Calvinists, or the doctrine of sanctification from the Methodists, or images of the saints on church walls from the Presbyterians, or baptism by immersion from the Baptists, or baptismal regeneration from the modern Churches of Christ? No, just the opposite, they all borrowed various parts from Orthodoxy. Why settle for just some parts when you can have the whole, the fullness? We still consider ourselves **truly Evangelical**, in fact more Evangelical than ever! We continue to love our Protestant brothers and sisters in Christ, and we'll always look back fondly at modern Evangelicalism as our "alma mater."

Worshiping in an Orthodox Church is a glimpse into eternity in heaven: when the priest announces at the start of the liturgy –

Why then did God allow the Protestant Reformation? I believe it was for the same reason that God allowed His Son to be born by a simple peasant girl into poverty in an oppressed nation. St. Paul wrote, *"But I ask, didn't Israel know? First Moses says, 'I will provoke you to jealousy with that which is no nation, with a people void of understanding I will make you angry'"* (Romans 10:19). The Jews had become "fat and happy," thinking that because they were God's chosen people nothing bad should ever happen to them. But then God used His Son Jesus born of a peasant girl and the Church He established to provoke the Jewish nation to jealousy. Likewise, the Orthodox Church in Russia and elsewhere, as well as Russians in general, have become provoked by the behavior of Western Christian missionaries. St. Paul went on to explain that the Jews would first react against, but then become reconciled with this Man they will eventually recognize as their Messiah. But when this occurs, I believe Russian Orthodoxy and Orthodoxy in general will go through a phase of restoration (it is already beginning!), leading to a similar restoration in Western Christianity. The prophet Amos foretold, the Lord said – *"I shall restore the fallen tabernacle of David, and I shall rebuild its ruins and repair its damages and rebuild it as in the days of old, that the remnant of men and all the nations upon whom My name is called will seek Me"* (Amos 9:11-12). In the end, God's elect remnant, not just Jews, or just Christians from Eastern Europe, or just those from Western Europe, but from all nations on earth will all worship the Messiah together in His holy temple.

The essence of Protestantism is just that, trying to drill down to just the essentials of New Testament Christianity: "Just the facts, ma'am, only the facts." But that is like dissecting a frog to discover what makes it jump – first you scramble its brain to kill it, then you cut open the legs and find muscles, nerve fibers, tendons and bones. Those make up the essence of "frog-jumpiness." But the frog doesn't jump any more, it's just a collection of dead parts. When we take such a "just the essentials" minimalist, rationalist, deconstructionist approach to Christianity, we're left with just a pile of parts that don't work any more. We've taken it apart, but we can't put it back

were living in Russia for 17 years, I served as General Editor of *Agape-Biblia* (www.agape-biblia.org), a revision of the Russian Synodal Translation of the Bible. I've also written three harmonies of the Gospels, in the Russian, Mari and English languages, I co-authored the first (and only) English-Udmurt / Udmurt-English dictionary and concise grammar, and I've translated or edited several other books in many different Central and East European languages.

In the early 1970s my wife Cheryl and I worked with a team that brought millions of Bibles, New Testaments and other Christian literature into those Central and East European communist countries. Our contacts in these countries included Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox Christians. When we returned to the U.S. in 1973 I founded and for 20 years I led "Christian Action," a non-profit mission organization to support those believers. With the fall of the Iron Curtain, we began visiting Russia in 1991, we moved there in 1993 to work with an Evangelical mission, and we sadly witnessed how this spirit of cooperation was being poisoned by a flood of unprepared, self-styled "missionaries" who were trying to *"win all those communists for Christ"* – totally unaware of the fact that Russia has been a Christian country for over 1,000 years. By the late 1990s the spirit of religious cooperation and toleration went out the window.

You may ask, *"Why doesn't everybody just get along with each other over there in Russia, the Ukraine and those 'stan' countries? We in the West have religious toleration, so why don't they?"* The historical roots go much further back than the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. Long before 1917 Russia has been characterized by a centralized government. And it's not simply that Russia never experienced a Protestant Reformation. Religious toleration in the West has led to over 30,000 different denominations and sects with contradictory doctrines, each claiming to be the most Christian. While attempting to work together in Russia to plant churches, we had people on our mission team from various denominations: what kind of church should we plant – a Bapti-Pente-Metho-Presby church? It simply

cannot work. In the Eastern Church more attention is paid to two things: unity and doctrinal purity.

In Eph. 4:3-6 we read - *"being eager to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you also were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in us all."* Many other Bible texts stress the oneness of the Body of Christ. The Eastern Church believes that *"one body"* means one visible, united Church. In contrast, Paul writes in Gal. 5:20 that *"strife... divisions, heresies"* are works of the flesh, right along with adultery, murder, drunkenness. and gluttony, and he writes, *"those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God"* (v. 21). So strife, division, and heresy are just as serious "mortal" sins as are adultery, murder, drunkenness, and gluttony. When Western toleration is taken to the extreme that all viewpoints and lifestyles are equally acceptable and true, we've crossed the line into approving of theological and moral relativism, strife, divisions, and heresies.

In the West, if we disagree with others in church, we often will simply start a new church, denomination or an un-denomination. But because strife, divisions, and heresies are such serious sins, the Eastern Church looks upon "sectarians" who split away from the Church as just as sinful as "heretics" whose doctrines may deny the Trinity (Molokans, United Pentecostal Church, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Children of God, Witness Lee movement, etc.), even though they may have fairly orthodox doctrines, and-or deny the unique God-manhood of Christ (Arianism, Nestorianism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons). And because the tsar or emperor was blessed by the patriarch or pope as the protector of the Church, the clergy could call upon state power to put down both "sectarians" and "heretics." The enforcement of Church teachings with state power gradually diminished in the West after the Protestant Reformation led to Western Europe's population being decimated by decades of religious wars, which finally caused the Austro-Hungarian Emperor to issue an Edict of Toleration. So it may not be such a tragedy that

yourself and those that hear you," he didn't mean that Timothy was his own savior or the savior of his audience, but that Timothy played a significant role. When James wrote (5:15 and 5:20) that a righteous man's prayers will save the sick, and that he who converts a sinner saves a soul from death, he didn't mean that good, saintly people can save people's souls all by themselves, but they can be God's instruments in saving others.

The point in each case is that we as Christians are to become co-laborers together with God in our own salvation and the salvation of others, and God Himself is the senior partner. God feeds the birds of the air, but we can be His agents by putting birdseed in a feeder. God beautifully clothes the flowers of the field, but we can plant and water some petunias. The former does not preclude the latter, just as God's foreknowledge and election of the saints do not preclude their free will and moral responsibility (1 Peter 1:2 and 13-14). We are our brother's keeper. So praying "Save us" to Mary or any of the other saints doesn't mean that these "old, dead people" are somehow the Savior. Rather, they are "alive unto God" (Luke 20:38), more alive in God's presence than we are here on earth, and these righteous people's prayers can have a great effect in our being saved and healed from our spiritual, moral and even physical infirmities (James 5:15 and 5:20). Of course, there are some who call themselves "Orthodox" but are ignorant of the clear teachings of Orthodoxy that forbid the worship of icons. We are to worship only the Triune God, but we should respect and revere the saints, and we can venerate icons that portray them. If some people mistakenly worship their icons, that doesn't mean that we shouldn't ask the righteous people of the past – the saints – to pray for us, or to come to our aid in our salvation. The aberration or the counterfeit does not invalidate the genuine. In fact, the counterfeit could not exist if there were no genuine article! Not only icons, but also money, sex, food, houses, cars, computers and even the Bible can become idols if we misuse them and worship them; but they can be helpful tools if we use them properly.

You may reply, *"Jesus said to the thief on the cross who repented, 'Today you will be with Me in paradise.' He didn't get baptized or join a church. What about him?"* You must not make an exception into the rule: you aren't dying on a cross with nails in your hands and feet, so this case doesn't apply to you. You may ask, *"What about the pagan in deepest, darkest Africa who has never heard the Gospel?"* That's a moot point for you. You're not a pagan in Africa, and you've heard the truth. (By the way, there are more Christians now in Africa than in North America!) Once you have a knowledge of the truth, it's impossible to return to the state of blissful ignorance. After being exposed to the truth, you can't simply walk away saying, *"I'm happy enough with the disbelief or denomination that I hold to now, even though I realize Orthodoxy is the closest thing to original Christianity."* Or you may say, *"Yes, it probably is the way Christians worshiped 2,000 years ago, but it's so foreign to me!"* Christian worship grew out of the first-century Jewish synagogue. Visit a synagogue today, and you will find worship very similar to Orthodox Christianity: chanting Scripture, incense, etc. Christianity originated in the Middle East, so it's normal for it to have a Middle Eastern flavor. If Orthodoxy seems strange and foreign to you, guess who changed? If God seems distant, guess who moved? *"Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you!"* (James 4:8).

You might object, *"What about praying to icons of Mary and other dead 'saints' to save you? Isn't that idol worship? Only Jesus saves! Christ said in John 14:6, 'I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father except by Me.'"* That verse is indeed true, but it should be understood in the context of all Scripture. As we have begun the process of being saved, healed and restored into the image and likeness of Christ, we have the privilege like the Apostle Paul to "save some" (Rom. 11:14 and 1 Cor. 9:22), helping others find this salvation and healing. Paul was not the Savior, but he was instrumental in "saving some." When Peter proclaimed at Pentecost (Acts 2:40), *"Save yourselves from this perverted generation,"* he wasn't implying that men can save themselves without God's intervention. When Paul wrote to Timothy (1 Tim. 4:16), *"save*

there has never been a Reformation in Russia: it may have been spared decades of religious wars. All of this at least partially explains why there is a lack of western-style "religious toleration" in the former USSR.

Jews, Christians, and Muslims all believe God is one, not many. But which one is the true God? That is our free choice, but religious freedom includes the possibility of being wrong. Historically, those who have claimed to know all truth absolutely have tended to force others to accept their beliefs. Ecclesiastical and doctrinal authority, however, should not extend to all of society, only within that religious organization. There should be true religious toleration – but not syncretism – in today's multi-cultural society, because having one state-enforced religious confession brings only superficial unity at the price of insincere belief. True belief can't be forced, or else it leads to unbelief. President Eisenhower, when Americans were deciding to put "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance, stated the matter with secular clarity: *"Our government makes no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith – and it doesn't matter which one."* No, it matters very much which one is true, but it is not within the domain of the state to tell its citizens which faith is the true one.

So religious toleration in society needs to be carefully framed something like this: *"The state upholds freedom of religious belief, confession and practice, and cannot enforce only one or a few religious confessions. This does not mean, however, that the state supports the idea that all belief systems are equally true, that no belief system is ultimately true, or that only unbelief is true."* Each person's right to believe does not make wrong beliefs right, rather, the freedom to choose inherently includes the possibility of making wrong choices. But we must acknowledge that religion has historically played a leading role in forming society's laws and morals. Laws assume moral standards, so it is impossible to keep religion and morality private, because religious beliefs or the lack of them affect all of human behavior, both public and private. Therefore the state should encourage all citizens, including those with religious beliefs, to participate in the formulation of morals and laws.

Have you ever noticed what Phil. 4:4-7 tells us about **Enthusiasm, Efficiency and Effectiveness**?

Enthusiasm: Phil. 4:4 – *"Rejoice in the Lord always! Again I will say, Rejoice!"* The word "enthusiasm" comes from Greek "***en theos***" – "in God." If we try to find happiness in material things or merely human relationships, we will eventually be disappointed. But we can find true happiness, joy, only in God. We need enthusiasm in order to get anything done. Psychologists tell us that without a healthy emotional-volitional condition, people can't make rational decisions: emotionally flat or "labile" people simply flip-flop around: *"Should I do this, or maybe that? I don't know, I just can't decide."* Only the Lord can give us real joy, "**en-theos-iasm**," the emotional charge we need to get going in the right direction.

Efficiency: Phil. 4:5 – *"Let your moderation be known to all men. The Lord is at hand."* Some modern translations put "gentleness" in place of "moderation" but I firmly believe that "moderation" is the correct translation of the Greek word "*epieikes*" – simply look at the context, verses 11-13, where Paul writes about living a moderate lifestyle. Moderation or efficiency means to *"lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us"* (Heb. 12:1), not being overloaded with excess baggage. In order for cars to run efficiently, they should be kept tuned up, but first of all they must be built with a strong enough frame, yet as light as possible in order to get good gas mileage. Similarly, we should keep our bodies in shape, "tuned up" by sufficient rest and the right kind of exercise, but also shed those extra pounds that drag us down, make us tired and inefficient, and eventually cause breakdowns. We should also shed the extra baggage of too many material possessions: each added thing requires time and resources to maintain it, polish it, clean it, etc. Often, "less is more" – having fewer things gives us more time for what is really important: *koinonia*-fellowship or communion with God and with other people (1 John 1:3-7).

Effectiveness: Phil. 4:6-7 – *"In nothing be anxious, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made*

such as the Trinity, the divinity and virgin birth of Christ, etc. and each having virtually no regard for Christ's command and prayer for unity. They are taught to think, *"If I disagree with or just plain don't get along with other believers, I can simply go to a new church or denomination, or start my own."* But that is heresy and sectarianism.

I don't mean to say that all Protestants are intentionally schismatics, sectarians or heretics. Many are fairly orthodox (small "o") Christians; relatively few are far out in left field, like the Trinity-deniers, snake-handlers, poison-drinkers or falling-down-laughing neo-Charismatics. Most of them simply accept the traditions they have been brought up in, they are personally not to blame for the divisions that happened centuries earlier. Not all people have received the full revelation of God's nature and His will for mankind. After the Lord had made His covenant with Abraham, He directed this forefather of the Jewish nation to Melchizidek, who is called "a priest forever" and "a priest of the Most High God" (Ps. 110:4; Heb. 7:1). He hadn't received the same revelation that Abraham had, but he had a close relationship with God Most High.

God's basic nature is mercy and *hesed*-lovingkindness, so He may overlook incomplete God-concepts and actions done in ignorance. But we must not presume upon God's mercy, thinking we can willfully believe whatever or behave however we want and God is obliged to put up with it. When my wife and I began examining Orthodoxy and became convinced of its truth claims, we had to choose it or else become personally responsible for remaining in error. In Luke 12:47-48 we read – *"That servant, who knew his lord's will, and didn't prepare, nor do what he wanted, will be beaten with many stripes, but he who didn't know, and did things worthy of stripes, will be beaten with few stripes. To whoever much is given, of him will much be required; and to whom much was entrusted, of him more will be asked."* We are only responsible for the light given us, but now that we know, we are responsible for what we know: *"For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them"* (2 Peter 2:21).

we officially became catechumens in January of 2008, and we were chrismated into the Antiochian Orthodox Church in December 2008, on the centennial of the passing into glory of my patron saint, John of Kronstadt. The Church of Antioch is the very first Church to the Gentiles, the oldest Christian Church in continual existence since the first century, planted by Barnabas and Saul in A.D. 38, and the Church where these Apostles launched their missionary journeys from.

The Antiochian Orthodox Church has been blessed with a huge influx of Evangelicals and other Protestants – often whole congregations – over the past 20 years, so that today the large majority of the members and about 75% of its clergy are former Protestants. Other Orthodox Churches in the U.S. are also growing and attracting many disillusioned Protestants. Lend an ear to **Ancient Faith Radio** – the manager of this Orthodox Internet radio network was formerly the manager of Moody Bible Institute's radio network and the announcer for Focus on the Family's radio program, and now has become an Orthodox Christian. One of the Ancient Faith Radio podcasts is "**At the Intersection of East and West**" by Deacon Michael Hyatt, former President and CEO of Thomas Nelson Publishers, the largest Christian publishing company in the world. Several other podcasts, such as "**Faith and Philosophy**" by Clark Carlton, a philosophy professor, and "**Pilgrims from Paradise**" by Matthew Gallatin, a former philosophy professor, are by Evangelicals who have found the fullness of their faith, and many of them are now Orthodox priests.

The Orthodox Church has been around for 2,000 years, and the Protestant movement has been... well, perhaps that describes it – it seems to have run its course. What started 500 years ago as "sola fide," "sola Scriptura" and "the priesthood of the believer" has now devolved into an individualistic "just Jesus, my Bible and me" and "I have the freedom and responsibility to decide for myself how to interpret the Bible and how to behave." What started as Lutherans led to Calvinists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists – now hundreds of Baptist denominations alone – and altogether about 30,000 denominations plus non-denominational independents of every imaginable flavor, several denying age-old Christian beliefs

known to God. The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus." It's quite possible, you know, to have efficiency without effectiveness. Efficiency is doing things right, but effectiveness is doing the right thing. You've doubtless heard of the husband driving the family on vacation down the wrong highway. He was being very efficient, getting great gas mileage, but was on the wrong road. Being anxious about this, that and the other thing, chasing down every rabbit trail of worry and fear, "What if such-and-such? I'd better take care of it!" – such excessive anxiety, messing around with little secondary details that could just as well be left alone, wastes time and keeps us from doing the main thing, worshiping and serving the Lord. When I was a systems analyst, I learned the rule: *"The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing."* How can we avoid the rabbit trails and keep on the main track? *"The peace of God... will guard your hearts (emotions) and your thoughts (reason)."* The Greek word for "guard" is "*phroureo*" – "to be a watcher in advance." Like an advance scouting party or a lookout, the Holy Spirit knows in advance, beyond our understanding, what's coming down the road in the future, and He can guard and guide us in making the right decisions, if we listen to His voice and let Him guide us.

Is There One Right Way To Worship?

The right thing, the main thing is worshiping and serving the Lord, so what's the "effective" way, the right way to do that? Let's take a look at James 1:22-25. James, the brother of Jesus, writes, *"But be doers of the word, and not only hearers, deluding your own selves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man beholding his natural face in a mirror; for he sees himself, and goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law, the law of freedom, and continues, not being a hearer who forgets but a doer of the word, this man will be blessed in what he does."* So how do we worship and serve the Lord? By **doing** what the Lord says, not merely singing hymns, listening to sermons or reading the Bible, but by applying the Word of God to daily life.

The last two verses, 26-27, tell us – *"If anyone among you thinks himself to be religious while he doesn't bridle his tongue, but deceives his heart, this man's religion is worthless. Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained by the world."* The Russian word for "religion" here is "reverence," which stirred my curiosity: what is the original Greek word? It is *threskeia*, which means ceremonial service of religion, various observances practiced by the Egyptian priests, such as wearing linen, practicing circumcision, shaving, etc. It is derived from *threomai*, to mutter forms of prayer, and often when it is used in the NT it often carries a negative connotation, but not always. If our religious habits and rituals, whether praying, fasting, singing hymns, preaching, listening to or reading the Bible, do not lead us into practical ministry to orphans, widows and other needy people and into leading a holy and pure life, that kind of religion is worthless. James apparently got his idea for this text from the Old Testament, Ezek.33:30-33, where the prophet Ezekiel says that people come to hear the words of the Lord simply for entertainment, just like listening to someone sing or play a flute, but they don't do them.

This James was the one who presided at the Council of Jerusalem, when the Apostles and Early Church were debating whether Christians must observe the Law of Moses, see Acts 15:5-21 especially 19-21, where he said, *"Therefore my judgment is that we don't trouble those from among the Gentiles who turn to God, but that we write to them that they abstain from the pollution of idols, from sexual immorality, from what is strangled, and from blood. For Moses from generations of old has in every city those who preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath."* So the Gentiles didn't have to observe the whole Law of Moses, just basic morality and cleanliness, but the Jewish Christians could continue to attend the synagogue and practice its religious rituals. The heart of the issue isn't how to or whether to observe religious rituals or not, but to lead a holy and pure life, and as St. Paul adds in his description of this event (Gal. 2:9-10), *"to remember the poor."*

human autonomy. This is a product of the Age of Enlightenment. The logical conclusion of this reasoning is that any choice will do, as long as it's a free choice (meaning: no religious or moral constraints). This leads to moral anarchy: if 51% choose to vote for "Freedom of Choice" (abortion), does that make it OK? Man has thus become the master of his own fate, the captain of his own soul. God has become at best an advisor, a good buddy, a friend, maybe even a subordinate. Man doesn't have to submit to God, or even pay Him any attention, if he chooses not to.

Does Evangelicalism Have a Future?

A good article my wife Cheryl found recently at https://christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/januaryweb-only/101-52.0.html is entitled "**Do Evangelicals Have a Future?**" It examines these and similar themes. It seems that Evangelicalism has come to the end of the road. It concludes -

> *"Consumerism and relativism stand out as dominant cultural trends that seriously threaten the future of Evangelical theology. When Evangelicals over-contextualize their message in response, they strip the gospel of its transformative power. 'To begin with, in our competition to be culturally "more relevant than thou," we have often forgotten that "what you win them with is what you win them to,"' Jeffrey says. No few problems with discipleship can be traced back to this problem. The Baylor University professor goes on to observe, 'Perhaps it is not too much to say that our "old, old story" has been too frequently overshadowed by the glitzy show-biz media we have tended to use to proclaim it.'"*

What church does not experience these dual problems of theological and moral relativism? What church does not try to be "culturally relevant" by adopting rock music: guitars, drums and a "worship team" of jiggly-wiggly guys and girls bopping and weaving in front of the congregation, singing second-rate, "Christian" rock music? What church neither revolts against authority, nor has an "infallible" human authority, a pope, for its members to revolt against? It's the Orthodox Church. This is why Cheryl and I have become Orthodox:

Only a few homosexuals acknowledge their desire as disordered and strive to lead holy and chaste lives; most of them these days claim to be heroes fighting for a just cause and to be martyrs when they are stricken with HIV/AIDS, or claim they were "born that way" (they lack free will and choice – they're predestined to this lifestyle). Only a tiny percent of them may have such a genetic predisposition: it is mathematically illogical and unscientific to make the statistical outliers of society into the norm, to make the exception into the rule. The relatively few cases of genetic defects, rape, or incest do not justify all homosexuality or abortion. Rather, we must realize that it became socially acceptable due to the "free love" sexual revolution and the Pill in the 1960s, then the Roe v. Wade case in the 1970s. Masking sexual sin as "love" and saying *"It doesn't matter who you love"* is affirming homosexuality. We can and should accept and love relatives and friends who yield to sinful compulsions without affirming their lifestyle. Christ accepted sinners including some who had committed sexual sins but He did not affirm their sins. He did not say to the woman caught in adultery - *"Go and sin some more"*; He said - *"Go and sin no more*." Christ accepts us just as we are, but He does not expect us to remain just as we were.

We all make choices – that's not the issue. The issue is making the right choices. In Joshua 24:15 we read, *"Choose this day whom you will serve, God or idols."* The question of human free will, the act of making a choice, coming to a point of decision, etc. is legitimate only as long as it doesn't become ultimate. Please allow me to explain: In a tract similar to the "Four Spiritual Laws" written by a former pastor of ours, it repeatedly uses the phrases in the concluding two pages – "your moment of decision," "faith involves a choice," "this is the moment of decision," "The Moment of Decision," "a conscious act of the will," "By my personal choice." Do you see what's happening here? Personal choice, decision, freedom, free will – repeated over and over, all emphasizing human autonomy, have become ultimate, absolute.

This over-emphasis on free choice, a moment of decision, an act of the will, etc., absolutizes and idolizes the human faculty of the will,

"For Moses from generations of old has in every city those who preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath." What does this mean? Do you remember when Jesus was asked why His disciples didn't wash their hands before eating? It was the same sort of question: should followers of Jesus keep all of the 600+ rules that the Pharisees had added to the Law of Moses? Jesus replied that the Pharisees require all sorts of ritual washings – hands, cups, plates, etc., – and tithing of mint, dill, anise and other spices, but they skip over the really important things such as kindness and mercy to the poor and needy. He summed it up by saying, *"These things you should have done, and not leave the others undone"* (Luke 11:42).

Do you see the similarity in these two passages? Both Jesus and James are trying to tell us that observance of religious ritual isn't necessarily wrong. Jesus says that in our desire to get down to the essence of the Gospel – faith, kindness and mercy – we should not leave these things, i.e. rituals, undone! James says that it's OK for Jewish Christians to continue with their ritual form of worship in the synagogues on the Sabbath! In fact, when we study Church history, we see that Christian worship from the very beginning was liturgical, it carried over many of the forms and rituals from the way Jews worshiped in the temple and synagogue. Christian worship was liturgical from the very start. It was James, the brother of Jesus, who wrote the first liturgy, and Orthodox Christians still celebrate the Liturgy of St. James on special church holidays. So it's not an either-or proposition: it's not either have faith, kindness and mercy or liturgy and ritual; it's a both-and proposition: we should both practice faith, kindness and mercy, and retain liturgy and ritual.

Traditional Or Contemporary Christianity?

Every Christian confession has its rituals and traditions or ways of interpreting what the Scriptures mean, it's just that some are only a few decades old and others are 2,000 years old. Calvinists study and follow the writings of "St." John Calvin, Lutherans study and follow the writings of "St." Martin Luther, so too Orthodox study and follow the writings of St. Ignatius, St. Polycarp, St. Athanasius, St. John

Chrysostom, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Basil the Great, etc. These are some of the Church Fathers who wrote commentaries on the Scriptures and together agreed on what makes up the canon of New Testament Scripture. If Protestantism rejects as "corrupt" the Church Fathers and their authority to interpret Scripture, it must also reject these same Church Fathers' authority to determine what is Scripture. Thus the Protestant hypothesis of "sola Scriptura" undermines itself by rejecting the authority of the Church Fathers who defined the canon of Scripture.

These innovations or "new traditions" sometimes go off on a tangent, and thousands or even millions of people can be led down the wrong path. It seems that Bill Hybels has now realized that things are not right at his Willow Creek Church, but will he and the movement he started find the right path now? Rather than trying to "re-invent church" every Sunday or at least every other month in order to keep things exciting and keep the crowds coming, how about returning to how the Church has been worshiping for the past 2,000 years? Here is an article describing this situation:

FIRST-PERSON: A shocking confession from Willow Creek Community Church leaders

By: Bob Burney
Original article can be found archived here:
https://web.archive.org/web/20100614224807/https://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=26768.

COLUMBUS, Ohio (BP)--If you are older than 40 the name Benjamin Spock is more than familiar. It was Spock that told an entire generation of parents to take it easy, don't discipline your children and allow them to express themselves. Discipline, he told us, would warp a child's fragile ego. Millions followed this guru of child development and he remained unchallenged among child rearing professionals. However, before his death Dr. Spock made an amazing discovery: He was wrong. In fact, he said:

"We have reared a generation of brats. Parents aren't firm enough with their children for fear of losing their love or

punishment of unbelievers. John Stott, InterVarsity's icon of Evangelicalism, also seemed to express that same position toward the end of his writing career. Let us hope and pray he changed his mind before he passed into the next world and discovered he was sorely mistaken.

Allowing members of the same denomination to choose mutually contradictory doctrinal views is opening the door to heresy, because the Greek word for "heresy" means "choice." This has resulted in today's widespread theological relativism among so-called Evangelicals. In the realm of moral relativism we have a lack of consensus about the sanctity of human life, so you can have pro-abortion ("pro-choice") and pro-life members of the same Evangelical denomination. You can have in the same Evangelical denomination pro-gay-clergy and anti-gay-clergy. Female clergy is not even an issue any more, it's accepted. If a pastor or parachurch leader commits adultery, homosexual acts or extortion, his denomination or organization might just rap his/her knuckles and then let him/her return to their former position in another congregation after a few months of counseling.

Theological relativism has led directly to this moral relativism and sadly is seeping into most Christian confessions. What a person really believes determines how he will act. Because of my bitter experience – having been molested along with several neighborhood children when I was about 8 years old, (the perpetrator was put in prison when the parents found out) – I have thoroughly researched this issue and learned that most homosexuals have sexual liaisons with anywhere from dozens to hundreds of people in their lifetimes, including some with children. So it is just a matter of time before Protestant denominations that affirm homosexual clergy or affirm adultery or homosexual acts will be plagued by more and more sexual immorality including child molestation and lawsuits claiming child sexual abuse by these same clergy or members, just as has recently happened in Roman Catholic parishes.

overarching authority to rein in "wayward" thought, opposing sides on controversial issues can only appeal to the Bible – yet the Bible is open to many diverse interpretations. Christianity's Dangerous Idea is the first book that attempts to define this core element of Protestantism and the religious and cultural dynamic that this dangerous idea unleashed, culminating in the remarkable new developments of the twentieth century. At a time when Protestants will soon cease to be the predominant faith tradition in the United States, McGrath's landmark reassessment of the movement and its future is well-timed. Replete with helpful modern-day examples that explain the past, McGrath brings to life the Protestant movements and personalities that shaped history and the central Christian idea that continues to dramatically influence world events today."

Each Protestant has as his working hypothesis the "right and responsibility" to interpret the Bible as he deems correct. But the result today is *"innovation, cultural incoherence and social instability"* as described above. Why only today, and not back when St. Martin (Luther) and St. John (Calvin) issued their anti-papal bulls? Because although they were anti-establishment, there was still a strong historical consciousness of respect for the Church's "overarching authority" as McGrath phrases it. They made use of that respect for an overarching authority when they issued their proclamations. But five centuries of Protestantism have led to the situation today of almost no respect for authority, virtual anarchy – theological and moral – even among Evangelicals. A former online student of mine belonged to a United Pentecostal church, which denies the real Trinity, redefining it as modalism. One of my theology textbooks from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, *Readings in Christian Theology, vol. 2* (Erickson), contains four articles by various theologians on the Virgin Birth, and only one of these authors believes in the Virgin Birth! The other three authors must believe that Jesus was an illegitimate child, not conceived by the Holy Spirit and therefore not God Incarnate. Another required reading for a course I took at the same seminary was *A Wideness in God's Mercy* (Pinnock) which advances the idea that there is no hell, no eternal

incurring their resentment. This is a cruel deprivation that we professionals have imposed on mothers and fathers. Of course, we did it with the best of intentions. We didn't realize until it was too late how our know-it-all attitude was undermining the self assurance of parents."

Oops.

Something just as momentous, in my opinion, just happened in the Evangelical community. For most of a generation Evangelicals have been romanced by the "seeker-sensitive" movement spawned by Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago. The guru of this movement is Bill Hybels. He and others have been telling us for decades to throw out everything we have previously thought and been taught about church growth and replace it with a new paradigm, a new way to do ministry.

Perhaps inadvertently, with this "new wave" of ministry came a de-emphasis on taking personal responsibility for Bible study combined with an emphasis on felt-needs based "programs" and slick marketing.

The size of the crowd rather than the depth of the heart determined success. If the crowd was large then surely God was blessing the ministry. Churches were built by demographic studies, professional strategists, marketing research, meeting "felt needs" and sermons consistent with these techniques. We were told that preaching was out, relevance was in. Doctrine didn't matter nearly as much as innovation. If it wasn't "cutting edge" and consumer friendly it was doomed. The mention of sin, salvation and sanctification were taboo and replaced by Starbucks, strategy and sensitivity.

Thousands of pastors hung on every word that emanated from the lips of the church growth experts. Satellite seminars were packed with hungry church leaders learning the latest way to "do church." The promise was clear: Thousands of people and millions of dollars couldn't be wrong. Forget what people need, give them what they want. How can you argue with the numbers? If you dared to challenge the "experts" you were

immediately labeled as a "traditionalist," a throwback to the 50s, a stubborn dinosaur unwilling to change with the times.

All that changed recently.

Willow Creek has released the results of a multi-year study on the effectiveness of their programs and philosophy of ministry. The study's findings are in a new book titled "Reveal: Where Are You?," co-authored by Cally Parkinson and Greg Hawkins, executive pastor of Willow Creek Community Church. Hybels himself called the findings "ground breaking," "earth shaking" and "mind blowing." And no wonder: It seems that the "experts" were wrong.

The report reveals that most of what they have been doing for these many years and what they have taught millions of others to do is not producing solid disciples of Jesus Christ. Numbers yes, but not disciples. It gets worse. Hybels laments:

"Some of the stuff that we have put millions of dollars into thinking it would really help our people grow and develop spiritually, when the data actually came back it wasn't helping people that much. Other things that we didn't put that much money into and didn't put much staff against is stuff our people are crying out for."

If you simply want a crowd, the "seeker-sensitive" model produces results. If you want solid, sincere, mature followers of Christ, it's a bust. In a shocking confession, Hybels states:

"We made a mistake. What we should have done when people crossed the line of faith and become Christians, we should have started telling people and teaching people that they have to take responsibility to become 'self feeders.' We should have gotten people, taught people, how to read their Bible between services, how to do the spiritual practices much more aggressively on their own."

Incredibly, the guru of church growth now tells us that people need to be reading their Bibles and taking responsibility for their spiritual growth.

implied in several passages. The Bible is "normative" but not "exhaustive," it is not infinite: the Old Testament is about 1,200 pages and the New Testament only about 400 pages in length. If it contained everything about God, Jesus Christ and how to live the Christian life, the Bible would be so huge that all the world could not contain it. (Also, it isn't a textbook on physics, geology, astronomy, biology, medicine or psychology, even though some fundamentalist Protestants insist it is!) Many things were passed on orally. When you read the Early Church Fathers, you'll find repeated references to the oral teachings of the apostles that they were careful not to put into writing because of persecution. Only much later, after Emperor Constantine in A.D. 313 issued his Edict of Toleration ordering the end of the official persecution of Christians, did the Church begin to write down many of these oral traditions.

The Evangelical-Pentecostal-Charismatic groups have their own traditions of Biblical interpretation, it's just that they are not quite as old, only about 75-100 years old. Nevertheless, the "evango-pente-matic" tradition is a very real tradition, with very real (if unwritten) rules or canons of Biblical interpretation. They go something like this: *"You can believe the Bible means whatever you think the Holy Spirit is telling you, with the exception that you must not accept the authority of older creeds or traditional churches outside of our loosey-goosey associations. You must not believe that it means just one thing in particular, rather, it means anything in general, whatever you think at the moment. You must be tolerant because all interpretations are equally valid."* But that isn't just toleration, it's incipient relativism.

Perhaps my above prose is "loosey-goosey," not as formal as Alister McGrath's, but my idea is similar to his, as expressed in his latest book, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea*. Here's a review of that book:

> *"The 'dangerous idea' lying at the heart of Protestantism is that the interpretation of the Bible is each individual's right and responsibility. The spread of this principle has resulted in five hundred years of remarkable innovation and adaptability, but it has also created cultural incoherence and social instability. Without any*

- *"Beloved, while I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I was constrained to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints"* (Jude 1:3).

What's fascinating is that in all of the above verses, "delivered" or "traditioned" is in the past tense: these oral traditions existed before the written traditions that later were collected and formed the New Testament. They refer to orally "traditioning" a body of dogma or teaching to the assembly of believers, the Church. We have seen in 2 Thes. 2:15 that Paul passed on (transmitted, or "traditioned") to the Thessalonians some things that were not written down. Many things were passed on by oral tradition. St. John also wrote of this: *"And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen"* (Jn. 21:25), and *"Having many things to write unto you, I would not write [word added] with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full"* (2 Jn. 1:12, see also 3 Jn. 1:13-14). The Early Church existed and even flourished for 30 years on the teaching that Christ and the Apostles orally "traditioned" before the first epistle of the New Testament was written, and it was another 30 years, about A.D. 90, before the Apostle John wrote the Revelation, the last book of the New Testament. Through all of those first 60 years the Church flourished without the whole New Testament.

Tradition doesn't trump Scripture in Orthodoxy, rather, Scripture flows out of Tradition. Orthodoxy teaches that the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God, and Orthodoxy does not invent new doctrines, such as the recently-invented Roman Catholic doctrines of purgatory, indulgences, papal infallability, the immaculate conception of Mary, or her being Co-Mediatrix along with Christ that have no foundation in Scripture. Those were the false doctrines against which Luther and other reformers started the Reformation, but Orthodoxy does not hold those doctrines. Not all dogmas or doctrines, however, are explicitly spelled out in the Bible: we don't find the word "Trinity" in the Bible, but this doctrine is clearly

Just as Spock's "mistake" was no minor error, so the error of the seeker-sensitive movement is monumental in its scope. The foundation of thousands of American churches is now discovered to be mere sand. The one individual who has had perhaps the greatest influence on the American church in our generation has now admitted his philosophy of ministry, in large part, was a "mistake." The extent of this error defies measurement.

Perhaps the most shocking thing of all in this revelation coming out of Willow Creek is in a summary statement by Greg Hawkins:

"Our dream is that we fundamentally change the way we 'do church,' that we take out a clean sheet of paper and we rethink all of our old assumptions. Replace it with new insights, insights that are informed by research and rooted in Scripture. Our dream is really to discover what God is doing and how he's asking us to transform this planet."

Isn't that what we were told when this whole seeker-sensitive thing started? The church growth gurus again want to throw away their old assumptions and "take out a clean sheet of paper" and, presumably, come up with a new paradigm for ministry.

Should this be encouraging?

Please note that "rooted in Scripture" still follows "rethink," "new insights" and "informed research." Someone, it appears, still might not get it. Unless there is a return to simple biblical (and relevant) principles, a new faulty scheme will replace the existing faulty one and another generation will follow along as the latest piper plays.

What we should find encouraging, at least, in this "confession" coming from the highest ranks of the Willow Creek Association is that they are coming to realize that their existing "model" does not help people grow into mature followers of Jesus Christ. Given the massive influence this organization has on the American church today, let us pray that God would be pleased to put structures in place at Willow Creek that foster not mere numeric growth, but growth in grace.

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And later, in April 2018, we learned a sad sequel: **Bill Hybels Resigns as Pastor of Willow Creek Community Church** amid allegations of sexual misconduct.

Perhaps what we need is to return to the concept of "***The Ministry Driven Church***" – the title of my doctoral dissertation, expanded and updated at **agape-restoration-society.org/ministry.htm**. It examines what St. Paul wrote in Eph. 4:11-13 – "He gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints to the work of ministry (*diakonia*), to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full grown man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." The task of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers is to prepare the saints – every Christian – to do the work of ***diakonia***-ministry: to be a servant, not a superstar.

Ancient And Modern Rejection Of Authority

"Innovation," "freedom," "tolerance" and "moral relativism" have become the watchwords of our modern culture. What happens, though, when people really believe that freedom means you should tolerate every viewpoint because no one viewpoint is any more true than another, that you can do whatever you want, and that everything is relative? We recognize the logical absurdity of modern culture in the phrase, *"Everything is relative, and that's the absolute truth!"* You see, without something – at least One Thing – being absolute, we have no fixed point of reference that other things can be relative to. In advanced algebra you probably learned how to solve a problem with multiple variables. The key is that there must be at least one known, fixed value, and then you can begin to solve each variable one at a time. But it's logically impossible to solve a problem that has an infinite number of variables and no fixed values.

Bible translations in English translate only the negative connotations of the Greek words *paradosis* as "tradition," but where it is used in a positive sense they translate it as "teaching" or "doctrine." It would thus appear that these translators may be trying to give an exclusively negative meaning to "tradition" although it is often used positively in the Bible.

As mentioned above, the verb form of *paradosis* is *paradidomi* in Greek, often used in the New Testament in the specialized sense of "delivering" or "passing on" a body of doctrine. Here are some more examples of its use:

- "*Since many have undertaken to set in order a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us, even as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word delivered them to us"* (Luke 1:1-2);
- *"All things have been delivered to me by My Father. No one knows who the Son is, except the Father, and who the Father is, except the Son, and he to whomever the Son desires to reveal Him"* (Luke 10:22);
- *"As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered the decrees [lit. dogmas] to them to keep which had been ordained by the apostles and elders who were at Jerusalem"* (Acts 16:4);
- *"But God be thanked, that you were the servants of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine [lit. teaching] which was delivered you"* (Rom. 6:17);
- *"But I praise you, brothers, that you remember me in all things, and you keep the doctrines as I delivered them to you"* (1 Cor. 11:2);
- *"For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed took bread"* (1 Cor. 11:23);
- *"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures"* (1 Cor. 15:3-4);
- *"For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them"* (2 Pet. 2:21);

Europe, the Time of Troubles in Russia and the communist era, the Orthodox Church had very few seminaries, thus many Orthodox priests and monks received their theological education in the West, resulting in a certain "Latinizing" influence in Orthodoxy.

Good And Bad Tradition

There are bad traditions and good traditions: in Mark 7:1-13 we read how Jesus excoriated the Pharisees for negating the commandments of God with human tradition, and in Col. 2:8 Paul tells us to beware of men's traditions that are not according to Christ. Those are bad traditions. But let's look at some good traditions: I've already mentioned Luke 11:42 – *"These things you should have done, and not leave the others undone."* That is, the imperative of doing good works does not mean that we should leave undone the traditional rituals and liturgical forms of worship. Also, in 1 Cor. 11:2 and 23, St. Paul wrote, *"Now I praise you, brothers, that you remember me in all things, and hold firm the traditions (Greek 'paradosis' = 'that which is passed on or delivered'), even as I delivered (Greek 'paradidomi', 'traditioned') them to you."* And *"For I received from the Lord that which also I delivered (Greek 'paradidomi') to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night in which he was betrayed took bread."* The Lord's Supper is the central Tradition of the Church, which was observed for decades **before** any books of the New Testament were written.

Again, St. Paul wrote in 2 Thes. 2:15 – *"So then, brothers, stand firm, and hold the traditions which you were taught by us, whether by word, or by letter."* Here we see there was a tradition or a body of doctrine that Paul passed on orally **before** he wrote this letter. A few verses later Paul wrote that this oral tradition was binding upon the Church: *"Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother who walks in rebellion, and not after the tradition which they received from us"* (2 Thes. 3:6). This good tradition, called Holy Tradition, resides in the Church to which Christ promised – *"However when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you (plural, i.e. collectively, not individually) into all truth"* (John 16:13). Interestingly, many modern

It is just as much an error to say that everything is relative, as it is to absolutize things that are culturally relative. Yes, many things in human cultures are relative, but relative to what? Everything can't be relative to everything else, that's a logical absurdity. We can't simply get along, we can't think rationally without some reference to an Absolute. Have you ever noticed how popular it's become for people to exclaim, "Absolutely!" – even though they profess not to believe in God? People crave an Absolute, yet they don't want to acknowledge their dependence on Someone greater than themselves. He whose Absolute is no greater than his own reasoning ability either has a very small Absolute, or a very large head. But this problem isn't a new one, it existed way back in Old Testament times, in the Book of Judges. You may recall when a young man named Micah stole 1,100 pieces of silver from his mother, he apparently felt guilty and confessed it to her:

> *"His mother said, Blessed be my son of Yahweh. He restored the eleven hundred pieces of silver to his mother; and his mother said, I most assuredly dedicate the silver to Yahweh from my hand for my son, to make an engraved image and a molten image: now therefore I will restore it to you. When he restored the money to his mother, his mother took two hundred pieces of silver, and gave them to the founder, who made of it an engraved image and a molten image: and it was in the house of Micah. The man Micah had a house of gods, and he made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest. In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes"* (Judges 17:2b-6).

Did you notice how she (mis)used the name of Yahweh? *"Blessed be my son of Yahweh"* and *"I most assuredly dedicate the silver to Yahweh."* But in spite of referring to God's name, she had a graven image – an idol – made from some of the silver. She referred to the Absolute, Yahweh, while at the same time abandoning His teachings. The telling phrase is right at the end: *"every man did that which was right in his own eyes."* Without a king – an authority – in Israel each person was a king unto himself and did whatever he wanted, made

up his own cafeteria-style religion by combining the name of Yahweh with idolatry, and believed that was just fine!

We have a similar situation in modern Christianity: the notions of *"sola Scriptura"* and *"the priesthood of every believer"* have come to mean that any believer can individually interpret the Bible however thinks is correct according to his own "custom-made Christianity," his syncretistic belief system, because he believes he has the Holy Spirit to guide him. And the notion of *"sola fide"* ("faith alone") has come to mean that all you need to do is to say *"I believe in Jesus"* and you're on your way to heaven, no good works necessary – they're even frowned upon because *"you might be trying to save yourself by good works."* The result today is that people pick-and-choose what parts of Christianity they want to believe, and discard the parts they find difficult or disagreeable. This idea arose in the Protestant Reformation when Luther reacted against the authoritarianism and abuses of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church. But today each individual can be a pope unto himself, thinking that the Holy Spirit gives him the authority to interpret the Bible however he sees fit.

When people really believe and put into practice the idea that everything is relative, that every man can do that which is right in his own eyes, pick and choose off-the-shelf parts of various religions and philosophies for his own custom-made belief system, then everything begins to fly apart. Isn't that where we're at today, with the disintegration of Western civilization? We heard about a Russian family that had immigrated to the U.S. and came into a mega-supermarket for the first time. After several minutes they ran out screaming, *"Too many choices!"* When we have a preconceived idea of what we need, we can zip into the 50-foot-long "crackers" aisle and target those soup crackers we need. But for someone who's accustomed to maybe six or eight different kinds of crackers at the most, too many choices is simply overwhelming.

The notion that we are free to reject institutional authority, whether that of church or state, is even embedded in the U.S. Declaration of Independence: *"Whenever any Form of Government becomes*

150 by an anonymous author, and Orthodox theologians admit that it is a spurious document. Although Mary is widely believed among Orthodox Christians to be "ever virgin" (Luther, Calvin, Wesley and many other early Reformers also believed this), it isn't official Orthodox dogma, as it is in Roman Catholicism. One can be fully Orthodox and not believe that about Mary. Also, Orthodox do not believe she was conceived immaculately: she had a human nature prone to sin. Although many Orthodox believe that she never committed any conscious, willful sin, this isn't Orthodox dogma. Catholic dogma teaches that Mary never died, but ascended into heaven like Elijah. Many Orthodox believe she died, but then was resurrected by Christ and taken up into heaven, but this too isn't dogmatized in Orthodox theology.

A couple more differences between the Orthodox and Roman Catholics are that Orthodoxy allows priests to be married, but Roman Catholicism forbids priests to marry, which St. Paul calls *"falling away from the faith"* and *"doctrines of demons"* (1 Tim. 4:1-3). Orthodox bishops are generally not married because they must travel so much, following St. Paul's example in 2 Cor. 9:5, but exceptions are allowed – I know personally Bishop Evgenii of Podolsk, an excellent Russian Orthodox bishop who is married. Also, Orthodox have icons (2-dimensional, flat images) of the saints, but the Catholics have statues (3-D, "graven" images). The Catholics have many, many statues of Mary without Christ, usually with her bleeding heart exposed, swords going through it, etc. The Orthodox icons of Mary virtually always include the infant Christ shown with a brighter halo inscribed with the Greek letters "ho on" ("I Am") and have less of a halo around Mary's head, and thus emphasize the Incarnation, God becoming man. There would be no Jesus Christ and no salvation without Mary giving birth to Him: *"without the Incarnation there is no Salvation."* So we venerate the saints and especially Mary, the Mother of Christ our God, but she's not a deity. In contrast, a whole Roman Catholic cult of Mary-worship has evolved, focusing on Mary, Mary, Mary and thus diminishing Christ. It should be noted, however, that during the Ottoman Empire in Central

is no firm historical record of him ever serving as a bishop in Rome. Also, *On The Apostolic Tradition* by Hyppolitus clearly shows that Rome did not have a monarchical ("supreme reigning") bishopric until about the middle of the third century: until then there were several bishops in Rome at the same time, and all were of equal rank. The Church of Antioch is the original "Christian" Church, where *"the disciples were first called Christians"* (Acts. 11:26), and where St. Peter was the first bishop.

Another difference between East and West is dualism. In Western Christianity there is a strong tendency toward Platonic dualism, which says that spirit is good but matter is inherently evil and will eventually be destroyed. In Eastern Christianity we view matter as neutral and capable of transformation. This is why Orthodox Christians don't close their eyes when they pray: they don't shut out the material world. Through the Incarnation, Mary gave God a material, human body. Jesus was fully God and fully man, thus Mary is revered as "Theotokos" – birthgiver of God the Word, not merely the mother of the human nature of Jesus. Christ was fully God and fully man from the instant of His conception, two natures in one Person, and Mary gave birth to the whole Person, not merely half of Him. Through the Resurrection and the Ascension, Christ's material, human body was transformed and taken into the heavenlies. He is still fully human, but glorified. Our goal as those who are *"called to be saints"* is for our whole self – spirit, soul and body – to be sanctified (1 Thes. 5:23), transformed into the glorious image and likeness of the glorified Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). This is called "theosis" or becoming *"partakers of the Divine nature"* (2 Peter 1:4), sharing in the divine energies but not the divine essence.

Also, there is less dogma in the Orthodox Church. For example, there are no dogmas about purgatory or indulgences in Orthodoxy, but these along with the papacy were the primary stumbling blocks that led Luther to reject Roman Catholicism. The stories of Mary's parents being Joachim and Anna who had been childless, her childhood in the Temple, her ever-virginity, etc. appear to have originated in a document called the *"Protevangelion of James,"* composed around AD

destructive... it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it. ...It is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government...." (By the way, one of my ancestors, Roger Sherman, descendant of a white slave, was the only person who signed that document and also the Articles of Association, Articles of Confederation and the U.S. Constitution: all four founding documents.) However, we must ask ourselves two ultimate questions: what is the true source of authority, and how is it preserved from becoming corrupt?

The Early Church developed mechanisms to maintain purity of doctrine and the holiness of those in authority. Don't get me wrong. It wasn't "all sweetness and light" in the Early Church: Tertullian, one of the early Church Fathers, had been a great theologian and compiled what is believed to be the first harmony of the four Gospels. But toward the end of his life he joined the **Montanists** who believed that because each Christian has the Holy Spirit to guide him, therefore he, Tertullian, or any other "Spirit-led" individual could make pronouncements that were just as authoritative as Scripture. For this, a council of bishops pronounced him a heretic and anathematized him. Here is what one of my seminary textbooks, *Early Christian Doctrines* (J.N.D. Kelly), says about this:

> *"The influence of **Montanism**, an ecstatic movement which originated in Phrygia in 156 and whose founder, Montanus, and his chief associates believed themselves to be vehicles of a new effusion of the Paraclete, worked in the same direction [to move the Church toward recognizing a fixed list or canon of inspired Christian Scriptures]. In the 'oracles' of their prophets the **Montanists** saw a revelation of the Holy Spirit which could be regarded as supplementing 'the ancient scriptures' (pristina instrumenta). From now onwards, therefore, it became a matter of immense concern to the Church that the New Testament, as it was coming to be called, should be credited with the right number of books, and the right books. Tertullian, for example, defended against Marcion the inspired character of the four Gospels in their integrity and of Acts, as well as of thirteen Pauline*

epistles. He also recognized Hebrews, attributing it to Barnabas, and both 1 John and Revelation." (pp.58-59)

"Like Irenaeus again, as we have already seen, Tertullian [earlier had] insist[ed] that the Church is the unique home of the Spirit, the sole repository of the apostolic revelation, with its teaching guaranteed by the unbroken succession of bishops. But these ideas underwent a radical transformation when, about 207, he joined the ***Montanists****, and for the visible, hierarchically constituted Church we find him substituting a charismatic society [my emphases]. He is even prepared at this stage to define the Church's essential nature as Spirit. Such being its nature, he claims, it must be pure and undefiled, composed exclusively of spiritual men. This rigorist strain in him, which had always been present, was thus given full rein, and he could argue that there can be no difference between clergy and laity, since authority belongs to those who possess the Spirit, and not [only] to bishops as such."* (p. 200)

So here you see several strands of thought:
1) **Montanism** was a heresy insisting that Spirit-filled "true believers" have the authority to speak as oracles of God, equally inspired as Scripture,
2) Thus the distinction between past or present ordained clergy and other believers was eliminated.
3) The response of the Church was to insist on the inspiration and authority of the apostolic Scriptures and the apostolic succession of bishops;
4) The correct interpretation of Scripture is only guaranteed by bishops in historic succession from the Apostles; and
5) The Church, led by bishops in Apostolic succession, is visible and tangible, not merely "invisible" or spiritual.

This is why I say that because *"sola Scriptura"* teaches that all we need is the Bible, that each and every believer can read, understand and interpret Scripture for himself, it is thus an incipient form of the **Montanist** heresy that Tertullian eventually fell into. If we suppose, *"We are pure and undefiled Spirit-filled believers, so we don't need to*

the Great's victory over them in 1783. Thus, the Russian Orthodox Church was also in no position to help the reformers. Luther and Calvin needed more than Orthodoxy's doctrinal faithfulness to withstand Rome's armies: they needed political and military assistance, and Orthodoxy was simply not a viable option for that. But the excesses and heresies of the Roman papacy are no reason for rejecting all early Christian doctrine and tradition from AD 90 to AD 1054.

Roman Catholics claim that Christ was referring to Peter when He said – *"On this rock I will build My Church"* and that St. Peter was the first pope (bishop) of Rome. Let's deal with these two points separately. First, Peter himself stated right on the Day of Pentecost – *"He [Christ] is 'the stone which was regarded as worthless by you, the builders, which has become the head of the corner.' There is salvation in none other, for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, by which we must be saved!"* (Acts 4:11-12). Salvation is found in Christ, not exclusively in the Roman Catholic church. And Peter later wrote – *"Because it is contained in Scripture, 'Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious: he who believes in Him [Christ] will not be disappointed.' For you therefore who believe is this honor, but for such as are disobedient, 'The stone which the builders rejected, has become the chief cornerstone'"* (1 Pet. 2:6-7). So Christ Himself, not Peter, is the Rock, the Cornerstone, on which the Church is built.

Second, regarding the "first pope" claim, this is like the medical statistician who, when his lady doctor friend he was having lunch with said she had to go and practice running for the marathon, said – *"I can tell you how to win the marathon easily: after the main group has run a few laps, start your clock then and join them!"* He was referring to how medical statistics can be skewed by excluding from the study group those who have already died of a given illness. Similarly, the "marathon clock" didn't start in Rome, contrary to the Roman Catholics' claim. Church history shows that St. Peter was first the bishop of the church in Antioch which was started in A.D. 38, and only later, about A.D. 62, he went to Rome and was martyred. There

are two sides of the same coin, but Orthodoxy was minted much earlier. The former two share many features, such as: 1) an unbalanced view of the Trinity, with Catholicism subordinating the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son (the "*filioque*" that the Catholics inserted in the Creed), or the reverse pendulum-swing of the modern charismatic hyper-Holy Spirit-ism; 2) the Augustinian views of predestination and total depravity, making all mankind guilty before God because of Adam's sin (but predestination can't be reconciled with human moral responsibility, this would negate guilt); 3) the need for an infallible earthly authority – either the Pope or the Bible; 4) both are individualistic Western-culture-oriented; and thus 5) both are genetically prone to schism: just as the pope declared he was free to "do his own thing," in Protestantism each individual is free to "do his own thing." But we must admit that all three have many common features because they originated from the same source: Catholicism split off from Orthodoxy, and then Protestantism split off from Catholicism, and continues to generate more and more schisms to this day.

Why didn't the Protestant reformers return all the way back to original, Orthodox Christianity? After all, in 1383 John Wyclif wrote, *"The pride of the Pope is the reason why the Greeks are divided from the so-called faithful... It is we westerners, too fanatical by far, who have been divided from the faithful Greeks and the Faith of our Lord Jesus Christ...."* Here's why: Rome's Crusaders raped and pillaged Constantinople in 1204, leaving it prone to repeated attacks by the Islamic Ottoman armies. The Ottoman Empire finally conquered a weakened Constantinople in 1453 and Athens in 1458. By 1500 most of Greek lands and islands were in Ottoman control. The Turks were driven back from the walls of Vienna on Sept. 11, 1529, but continued to hold Greece until the late 1800s. So the Greek Orthodox Church was in no position to help the reformers in the 1500s.

The Mongol Empire had invaded Russia in the 1240s and was not driven back to the Crimean Peninsula until the early 1500s, where it became allied with the Ottoman Empire and from where it continued wreaking havoc on Ukraine, Russia and even Poland until Catherine

submit to the interpretation of Scripture given by holy men of God who have preceeded us, the bishops and theologians of the Church throughout all of Christian history – they were corrupt anyway – we're smarter and more spiritual than they were," and suppose that every believer can rely on *"sola Scriptura,"* we open ourselves up to falling into heresy. Holy Tradition is by definition the correct interpretation of Scripture. Consider how many modern Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Charismatics, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses think that they can interpret the Bible with no reference to any outside authority, or speak in tongues and prophesy "in the Spirit" with inspired authority equal to or even superseding the Scriptures. Thus the same sort of heresies keep cropping up today as happened back in the first centuries of Christian history: *"He who does not learn from the mistakes of history is bound to repeat them."*

How Do We Get Back To Original Christianity?

How can we restore the simplicity, unity and harmony that once existed in early Christianity? The Holy Spirit speaks through the consensus of the Church throughout the centuries, *"that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all"* (St. Irenaeus of Lyons). No single Church Father, bishop, patriarch or pope by himself has the authority to speak for God in a way that is binding for all Christians. The source of authority is God the Holy Spirit speaking and working through the whole Church throughout history. How should we properly interpret the Scriptures? For the first couple of centuries after Christ, people believed that the Gospels and the writings of the Apostles were all they needed. But inevitably various other heresies arose, such as:

Docetism – Christ is only a spirit and merely *"dokeo"* (appears) to be man;
Gnosticism – Christ is a demigod in a panoply of demigods that lead up to the top god, and secret *"gnosis"* (knowledge) saves with no need for repentance or virtuous living;
Antinomianism – rejecting Gnosticism, this "against law" teaching says belief alone (*"sola fide"*) saves, apart from repentance, good works, and striving toward holiness;

Montanism – (see above) combining parts of Gnosticism and Antinomianism, taught that all true believers have special spiritual gifts, thus can reject Church authority;
Modalism – God is One, but appeared in three "modes": the Father morphed into the Son when Jesus was born, then the Son morphed into the Holy Spirit when Jesus ascended into heaven;
Nestorianism – the man Jesus was two persons, a human Christ and the divine Logos, which dwelt in the man, and...
Arianism – Christ was not divine, but rather, a created being like us; a good man and a prophet, but not the eternal Son of God.

Which of today's sects or relativism do these heresies sound like? Some modern-day sects such as the United Pentecostals believe in Modalism. And Islam can be understood as derived from Arianism, because after the decisions of the First Ecumenical Council (325 A.D.), the Arians were exiled into the Arabian Peninsula where an Arian priest taught Mohammed that Jesus was just a good man, a prophet, but not the Incarnate Son of God. After the First Ecumenical Council came together in the city of Nicea, the Second Ecumenical Council met in Constantinople in A.D. 381 to deal with this issue concerning the Holy Spirit, and formulated by consensus of bishops what is known today as the...

Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed

I believe in One God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, Begotten of the Father before all worlds; Light of Light, Very God of Very God; Begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father, by Whom all things were made: Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man; And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried; And the third day He arose again, according to the Scriptures; And ascended into Heaven, and sits at the right hand

Fathers and Councils of A.D. 100-800 the dictatorial control and corruption of the Roman Papacy of A.D. 1517, the time of Luther's Reformation. These arguments simply do not apply to Orthodoxy. Actually, the Reformation should be called "the Protestant Revolution" because although Luther tried at first to reform the Roman Catholic Church, he got the "left foot of disfellowship" and then led a revolution against it. But it was the Patriarch of Rome who almost 500 years earlier, in A.D. 1054, had first led a revolution against all the other Patriarchs. Orthodoxy is not just *"a strange kind of Catholicism but with cooler hats,"* as someone once said. Rather, Catholicism is a deviant form of Orthodoxy, which is Original Christianity, no longer in its infancy but grown up by twenty centuries, yet still the same entity that has maintained its identity by means of Spirit-led Holy Tradition.

Is a forty-year-old lady doctor the same entity she was twenty years earlier? Yes, indeed! At age twenty, though, she was just entering adulthood, she hadn't yet received her medical training or gotten married and had any children. Would she want to give up any of these – her loving husband, her doctoring skills, or her two wonderful children, in order to return to what she was twenty years earlier? Of course not! And if another twenty-year-old woman were to come into the hospital wearing that doctor's name tag, she would very quickly be recognized right off as an impostor. In the same way it is foolish to ask or even imagine that the Church should somehow return to where she was twenty centuries ago, forsaking her spiritual union with Christ, her accumulated skills of healing spiritual illness, or her heritage of the great sons and daughters of the Church. And a denomination or person who, looking back 15 or 20 centuries, tries to reconstruct the New Testament Church while ignoring 20 centuries of Church history or the historical fact that the original Church still exists after 20 centuries, is either ignorant, self-deceived or is knowingly acting as an impostor.

Keep in mind the **ABC**s of Orthodoxy – it's "**A**nything **B**ut **C**atholic!" It's probably easier to compare classical Catholicism with classical Protestantism than with Orthodoxy. Catholicism and Protestantism

be morally disqualified or just plain contentious and argumentative (*"avoid those kinds"* Paul writes elsewhere).

In 1 Tim. 4:14 and in 2 Tim. 1:6 Paul reminds Timothy of the spiritual gift given him by the laying on of hands, and in 1 Tim. 5:22 he instructs Timothy to be careful whom he (Timothy) selects to ordain by the laying on of hands. So Paul passed on his apostolic authority, his spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:28) to Timothy, and instructed him to be careful about whom Timothy would ordain (1 Tim. 3:2-13) to the presbytery and diaconate: faithful men who are able to teach (2 Tim. 2:2), not just any believer. Similarly, Paul appointed Titus as bishop in Crete so that Titus could ordain presbyters (later shortened to "prests" = priests) in every city, giving Titus lists of qualifications for the office of presbyter (Tit.1:5-9). This certainly looks like there was an established hierarchical authority in the New Testament Church.

Just imagine: if your viewpoint is that the Holy Spirit gives you insight to understand the Scriptures as you believe is correct with no regard to historic Apostolic authority, what would happen if you told your friends at your Evangelical church that you see fit to interpret the Bible in a strictly Orthodox or Roman Catholic fashion: would your church tolerate your viewpoint? Very likely not, because you see, all churches have their traditions and methods of Biblical interpretation. It won't do to say, *"I don't accept tradition, I only believe the Bible,"* because we all read and understand the Bible through the interpretive lens of our respective traditions. We gather together with like-minded people: for example, if you were to begin teaching Jehovah's Witness interpretations of the Bible in a Lutheran church, they would rather quickly and unceremoniously give you the "left foot of disfellowship" out the door!

In order for any newer system of Biblical interpretation to unseat an older system, it must attempt to discredit the older one. The problem is, the typical Protestant anti-tradition and anti-hierarchy arguments are "anachronisms" when applied to the historic Orthodox Church. (An anachronism is projecting something farther back into history than the facts warrant.) So, they are projecting onto the Early Church

of the Father; And He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, Whose Kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, and Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, Who spoke by the Prophets;

And I believe in one holy, catholic and Apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

You may notice that the Creed doesn't begin with *"I believe that the Bible is the divinely inspired and inerrant Word of God"* (although we do believe this!) or a similar phrase as is found in many Protestant doctrinal statements. Why? Because the Nicene Creed actually predates by 72 years the definition of the New Testament canon at the Council of Carthage in A.D. 397. In that semi-literate culture where books were rare and expensive, the Church mainly used oral tradition for almost 400 years before the Bible was defined. As the Apostle Paul wrote: *"hold the traditions received from us, both oral and in writing"* (2 Thes. 2:15).

This is the only Creed that is confessed by Orthodox, Roman Catholics and Protestants alike. (Roman Catholics are now willing to drop their *filioque* phrase, i.e., the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father *and from the Son*" that the Pope unilaterally added to the Creed, which led to the Great Schism of A.D. 1054.) It is thus the only Creed capable of reuniting all Christians. It declares clearly that God is One Essence that consists of three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It emphasizes that Christ is both fully God and fully man, born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and that only by believing in His virgin birth, His death on the Cross and His resurrection can we have **eternal life** in the world to come. And in this Creed we confess the unity of all true Christians in one Universal Church.

The word "catholic" above is sometimes translated "universal" in English. The Russian version of the Creed uses the word "conciliar,"

which refers to the Seven Ecumenical (Universal) Councils of bishops that hammered out the various doctrines of the Christian faith. It also refers to the "fullness" of truth and worship that is to be found in the united, real Church, the visibly united body of all believers that has existed since the first century, not an "invisible" Church that one can only imagine belonging to.

But we do not believe that there are no true Christians and no valid worship outside of the visible Church. Rather, as some Orthodox theologians have stated, *"We know where the Church is, but we do not know where She is not."* The Church is true, not in the sense of perfect, but in the sense of genuine: in spite of the tares among the wheat, the visible Church continues to confess Christ and practice His teachings from the first century to the present. Yes, there is much that is good and true outside the visible Church, but the fullness of truth and worship is only to be found in Her, the Bride of Christ, Who is Her Head.

So confessing the **Nicene Creed** together is the first, giant step toward Christian theological unity. But how can we achieve practical unity? It might be too much to ask for all true Christians to suddenly abandon their institutions and join a unified Church. But would it be too much to humble oneself like a little child, to become a servant and begin to minister to orphans and widows, to the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind? Would it be possible to **C**onstruct the **C**onditions that **C**reate **C**hristian **C**ommunity? I believe the answer is ***"Yes!"***

This is what Cheryl and I have been working and striving towards for the past several years: to restore the historic **practical *diakonia*-ministries** to the handicapped, widows and orphans in order to construct such a Christian ***koinonia*-community**, where Christians serve one another in love, where they don't bite and devour one another, bad-mouthing and tearing down the secondary, culturally-relative differences of others in the Christian community. Instead, *"speaking truth in love, we may grow up in all things into Him, Who is the head, Christ; from Whom all the body, being fitted and knit*

heresies he was just writing about in chs. 10 and the first part of 11? Those of carnal believers grumbling against authority!

Notice how Paul begins ch.11, urging people to follow him, then he mentions how man's head is Christ, and Christ's head is God. He is writing about the divinely-appointed authority structure. Every man has authority to pray or speak, but it comes under the authority (headship) of God, Christ and the Apostles, Paul's in this case. Now let's skip ahead a bit to ch.12 where Paul writes about the various spiritual gifts. Look at vv.27-31: what is the first gift? Apostleship (v.28)! Here we see a definite order or priority or hierarchy of gifts. Christ ordained the twelve Apostles, then He commissioned them (Mat. 28:18-20) to make more disciples by baptizing, teaching and showing them how to minister. There's a definite order here: first a person believes and is baptized, then he is taught – discipled, shown how to do ("observe" or carry out) what Jesus showed His disciples to do. This takes time, a new believer isn't ready or able right off the bat to go out preaching the Kingdom of God, healing the sick, cleansing lepers or casting out demons (*"this kind only comes out by prayer and fasting"* – spiritual disciplines that a believer must learn by building godly habits).

First, note in Acts 1:20 when the remaining eleven Apostles were deciding how to replace Judas – *"For it written in the book of Psalms, 'Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein,' and 'his bishopric* [Greek: *episkope*] *let another take.'"* From this it is clear that the Apostles considered their office as that of a bishop. Next, look carefully at 2 Tim. 2:1-2 – what kind of people does Paul command or commission Timothy to disciple? Men who are faithful (true to the faith) and able to teach others. Not everyone has these gifts of faithfulness to true doctrines and the ability to teach. Paul selected and ordained Timothy to make disciples, and told him what kind of people to select and train: not just any and every believer should evangelize and make disciples, and not just any and every believer can be a good disciple. Some are new believers, others are carnal believers, or they may not have the spiritual gift of teaching, or may

Moses and Aaron's authority, saying *"You take too much on you, seeing all the congregation are holy, everyone of them, and Yahweh is among them: why then lift yourselves up above the assembly of Yahweh?"* This is exactly the same issue as the misuse of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers – *"We're all holy, we're all kings and priests, so why should we be under those leaders who put themselves above us, over the Church?"* ("assembly" = "*kahal*" in Hebrew, translated "synagogue" in the LXX, from which we have "*ekklesia*" = "coming together" or "assembly" = "church").

You know, of course, what happened to Korah and the other Levites with their families: the earth opened up and swallowed them alive. Then fire came down from the Lord and consumed the other 250 rebellious Israelites (vv. 23-35). But notice the very next thing that happened: the children ("carnal" ones) of Israel said to Moses, *"That's not fair!"* (vv. 41-42, my paraphrase), and Moses had Aaron take incense and intercede for the Israelites (vv. 46-48, see also v.21) so that the Lord would not destroy the whole nation, but even at that over 14,000 Israelites died.

St. Paul uses these and similar incidents in 1 Cor. 10:1-10 as examples of the Israelites' grumbling and revolting against Moses and Aaron's authority. Then in vv. 16-12 he begins writing about taking communion at the Lord's Table vs. communing with demons. Paul also touches on the issue of authority in 1 Cor. 11:1-16 (v.10 – "*exousia*" = "power" or "authority"), concluding with *"we have no such custom,"* i.e. of people contending for the authority of ordinary believers to eat meat sacrificed to idols, or contending for the right (authority) of women to pray or speak in the assembly with their heads uncovered. So the context of chs. 10 and 11 is about order in worship vs. grumbling and contentiousness by people who are trying to falsely assert authority. Then St. Paul continues on the theme of communion at the Lord's Table in ch. 11:17-34. But look carefully at how he begins this discourse: he writes, *"You harbor divisions and heresies among you, so when you assemble for worship, you can't call it the Lord's Supper"* (vv.17-22). What were the kinds of divisions and

together through that which every joint supplies, according to the working in measure of each individual part, makes the body increase to the building up of itself in love" (Eph. 4:15-16). It's time for Christians to grow up and live together in peace, don't you think?

Are All "Churches" And "Parachurch Ministries" OK?

When I was president of our InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (I.V.) chapter at University of Colorado in 1966, I was asked to consider joining InterVarsity staff, but I declined because, as I explained to them, InterVarsity isn't a church, it can't baptize new believers or serve communion, so where do people go after they come to Christ through InterVarsity? Often they never find their way into church membership, so a large majority of I.V. converts just disappear. (Nevertheless, we served for many years with an un-denominational Evangelical mission organization whose stated goal is planting churches – what kind of churches? – what denomination or flavor? – it doesn't matter as long as they're "Evangelical," whatever that means – the definition kept shifting.) About 30 years later, in 1996, an article called "**The Church Is Visible and One**" began to drastically change my thinking. The author, Patrick Barnes, was a participant in our "**Evangelical-Orthodox Conference**" (now the "**Agape Restoration Society Chat/Video Forum**") – an online discussion group I founded and led for a few years beginning in 1996. At that time I couldn't accept all their positions, sometimes stridently expressed.

Nonetheless, that article started me thinking. Perhaps I'm a "late bloomer" – in early 2007 at age 63, after reading several books on Orthodox theology and attending Orthodox liturgical worship many times, I read Fr. Peter Gillquist's book ***Becoming Orthodox*** [also **in Russian**]. He was a leader of the 2,000 Evangelicals who joined the Antiochian Orthodox Church in 1988. Finally I came to the conclusion that the Orthodox Church is indeed the original and true Church. If so, then other so-called churches and parachurch organizations just aren't – there can be no room for the relativistic view that somehow all "churches" are OK options. At first we began to believe that

Orthodoxy was OK too, one of the available options, but then we came to see that it is the only option with the "fullness of the faith." And so, we – my wife and I – must make haste to join the true Church. This has been a difficult and expensive decision for us, meaning that we would leave our mission organization, our home church, the financial support and the health insurance these groups were providing, and begin again as neophytes in the original, Orthodox Christian Church.

"The true Church" does not necessarily mean perfect, i.e., that all of the teachings by all of the Church Fathers have always been 100% true and correct, or that the behavior of Orthodox clergy and laypeople has always been exemplary: it is a divine-human organism, and the human side has human faults. Rather, it is true in the sense of genuine. Jesus Christ said He would build His Church, singular, one; not 30,000 different denominations and numerous un-denominations, all calling themselves "churches." The Orthodox Church is the "real deal." For example, we often call a photocopy machine a "xerox" machine, even though it might be made by Panasonic or Kyocera, etc. The off-brand companies may even have improved and/or simplified some aspects of the technology. They reproduce copies almost like a real Xerox machine, and maybe even faster. But they're not one. Only a Xerox is a Xerox. Only the Orthodox Church is the Church, other "churches" are treating the word as if it were a generic term. Other Christian confessions may try to reproduce Christians, and maybe even faster – "more copies per minute," but Evangelicals' simplified technology means that often "the toner doesn't stick" – even if they pretend it does, the image of the original is marred or totally gone.

The Orthodox Church makes people into real, lasting Christians. It may be possible for a person to become a Christian without being in the visible Church, just as it's possible for a man and woman to have a one-night stand and produce a baby. But why abandon a baby on someone else's doorstep? Why go out evangelizing and then simply dump the newborn believers, as so often happens with non-denominational street-corner witnessing and evangelistic crusades?

pondered this alot over the years. It's a very complex, thorny issue. As you may know, in general each Evangelical congregation owns its buildings and land. This gives these congregations a sense of independence and freedom from denominational domination, if they even belong to a centralized denomination. But this independence often leads to doctrinal and liturgical "experimentation," meandering around the wilderness of theological thought, down the rabbit trails of centuries-old bygone heresies, and into denominational and intra-congregational disputes and splits. Our former church has gone through this wrenching process twice and just about fell apart at the seams. Often I think, *"If only they had a bishop who could be called on to come and make peace between the warring factions, this infighting would stop!"* But centralized ownership of buildings and land has led throughout history to its own set of problems. What if there could be a mixed form of property ownership?

It would look like this: individual members and families in a given congregation own parts of the property in the form of condominium-like cooperative residential units, and the Church or denomination owns the central meeting hall (nave and sanctuary) plus office / classroom space and the land. This gives the members a sense of ownership and responsibility, having "bought into" the property, it greatly reduces the local congregation's cost for the property, and still allows for some central control in order to have the "muscle" to resolve disputes that might arise. If families strongly disagree with these decisions, they can simply sell their shares in the cooperative and move out. They don't lose all the material resources they've poured into the congregation over the years. See my detailed description of such a ***koinonia*-community**.

Regarding the authority of Church leadership and attempts by ordinary ("carnal") believers to usurp it: read Numbers 7:6-9 describing how certain clans of the Levites were to transport the Tabernacle but only the sons of Kohath should carry the Sanctuary. Next read Numbers 12, where Aaron and Miriam revolted against Moses' authority. And then read Numbers 16:1-3 where Korah, a descendant of Kohath, led 250 Israelites who tried to revolt against

of Antioch (after St. Peter); **Ignatius**, who according to tradition was the little child Jesus held in His arms when He said – *"Let the little children come unto Me"* – he was another disciple of St. John, and later was ordained as third Bishop of Antioch in A.D. 67; and so on and on. On the way to his martyrdom in Rome, St. Ignatius wrote in A.D. 107 – *"Obey your bishop!"* Obviously he had no vested interest in that statement because he was being taken away to be fed to the lions.

In the early Church and in the Orthodox Churches today, there is a collective, conciliar form of leadership (Acts 15:1-33) in which all the bishops share an equal degree of authority and an equal vote, whether they are called bishop, archbishop, metropolitan or patriarch. When Christians submit to this unified but conciliar form of church government, it creates a self-correcting mechanism or "quality control" of doctrine by which each and every theologian corrects the others. But if one theologian believes he knows better than all the rest, rejects conciliar unity and splits off to form his own denomination, this "quality control" is lost. It was the conciliar agreement of bishops in the late fourth century that finally determined the canon of Scripture. This came only after the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed was fully formulated in the councils of A.D. 325 and A.D. 381. So that is why the Bible isn't even mentioned in the Nicene Creed – the canon of Scripture hadn't been fully defined by then! Thus, the authority of God in Christ is first and ultimate, and the authority of Scripture as correctly interpreted by the universal councils of bishops is secondary, in terms of both logical and historical priority. It isn't a matter of Scripture "versus" Tradition – they should not be juxtaposed against each other, rather, they constitute one interwoven tapestry, and if we pull on what we think is a "loose thread" here or there, the whole thing may begin to unravel: if we reject the authority of the Early Church Fathers, we undermine the canonicity of the New Testament Gospels and Epistles.

2) Regarding a centrally-organized religious hierarchy having centralized ownership of its congregations' buildings, I have

A baby should be born into a permanent family. The bond of marriage is an image or type of which the Church is the reality, the antitype. Just as the institution of marriage is the only legitimate union of man and woman and the place where babies should be born and raised, so the institution of the Church is the only legitimate union of us, the Bride, to Christ, and the place for new Christians to be born and nurtured. Being thoroughly aquainted with, in love with and committed to marry a man is not the same as being united to him in permanent and monogamous marriage. In the same way, knowing, loving and worshiping Christ is not the same sort of deep knowledge as being united to Him in His Body, the Church. Christ isn't a polygamist, He has only one Bride, the one true Church. If we emphasize a personal relationship with Christ and depreciate the need to be united with the historic Christian Church, we should not be surprised if our children simply "sleep together" with others since they see no need for the institution of marriage, because we have relativized the need for the ideal institution, the Church, of which marriage is an image.

The right way to have a baby and raise it is in a legitimate, lasting family. The right way to produce healthy baby Christians is in God's family, the historic Church. Doubtless, there are Christians outside the visible Church, just as there are a relatively few "living together" couples who remain together for life and people get well outside of hospitals. But the Church is the hospital for healing the disease of sin through the "medicines of immortality" – the Sacraments. Salvation is a life-long process that requires devotion and work to make it stick. Why settle for a stripped-down "economy model" of Christianity, when you can have the real thing? That minimalist-deconstructionist approach is similar to a bride asking her fiance – "When I marry you, how little time must I spend with you, and how many other men can I flirt with, in order to stay married?" No, the goal of marriage is the complete union of two people. The end goal of salvation is union with God, theosis or sanctification, becoming transformed into the image of Christ. But with Evangelicals' simplified doctrine of *"Just believe in Jesus, raise your right hand, and*

you'll go to heaven when you die, guaranteed!", there's no need to *"strive for holiness, without which no one will see God"* (Heb. 12:14).

The popular Evangelical doctrines of *"once saved always saved"* predestination, *"sola fide," "sola Scriptura"* and *"the priesthood of every believer"* may attract lots of new converts, but because these ideas appeal to human ego, they often lead to presumption and pride which in turn lead to a downfall. How many Evangelical pastors, missionaries and parachurch leaders do you know of who have fallen into grievous or mortal sins such as adultery, extortion, homosexuality, misappropriation of funds, or gluttony? I can name at least half a dozen whom I've known personally. But does their denomination or organization excommunicate them, or even just remove them permanently from leadership, as the Early Church did? Most often not: *"Well, Joe, once you're saved you're always saved, so we'll just counsel you a few months and then you can get back into leadership."* Or the errant leader simply quits that "church" and starts a new one. What a horrible message this communicates to rank-and-file members! *"If he can get away with it, then so can I – let's do it, sweetie-pie!"* So there is a need for some kind of authoritative structure, some sort of ecclesiastical control. Just as the Early Church did, the Orthodox Church today can and does remove priests, bishops, metropolitans and even patriarchs who fall into gross sin or heresy, and they may not be allowed to serve again.

Apostolic Or Scriptural Authority?

The issue of ecclesiastical authority is twofold:
1) Is Scripture the ultimate authority, and if so, who or what is the reliable interpreter of Scripture? and,
2) Does a centrally-organized religious hierarchy necessarily imply a centralized ownership of its congregations' buildings?

1) About the authority of Scripture versus Tradition: for a long time I've been troubled by the doctrinal statements of Evangelical churches and mission organizations, including the mission we formerly worked with – I had a discussion with their top leadership about it but got nowhere. The first article of faith in all these creeds

goes something like this: *"I believe that the Bible is the divinely inspired, inerrant Word of God and is the ultimate authority for faith and practice."* Then follows, in second, third, fourth, etc. place, *"I believe in God the Father," "I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God," "I believe in the Holy Spirit"* and so on. What this implies is that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are subordinate to the Bible! In place of an infallible Pope, Evangelicals have an inerrant Paper Pope, the Bible. In actuality, however, because every believer can interpret the Bible as he believes the Holy Spirit is leading him, each believer becomes an infallible pope unto himself. But when we look at the ancient creeds, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed or the Apostles' Creed, there's no mention of the Bible at all. I have come to believe that the Bible and the Church both only have an authority that is derived from the triune God, Who in Christ said – *"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, but they testify about ME"* (John 5:39) and *"All authority in heaven and on earth is given unto ME"* (Mt. 28:18).

So if God in Christ is the ultimate authority, how was that passed on? That authority was passed on to the Apostles in a conciliar form of leadership, and from them to their immediate successors, such as Timothy, bishop of Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3 and 4:14), Titus, bishop of Crete (Titus 1:4-5); Aristarchus (Acts 19:29; Col. 4:10), bishop of Apamea in Syria; Sosthenes (Acts 18:17; 1 Cor. 1:1), bishop of Caesarea; Tychicus (Acts 20:4; Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7; 2 Tim. 4:12; Titus 3:12) who succeeded Sosthenes in Caesarea; Simeon (Mt. 13:55; Mark 6:3), son of Cleopas (Luke 24:18; according to tradition a brother of Joseph, the betrothed of the Virgin Mary), who succeeded James as bishop of Jerusalem; Jason and Sosipater (Rom. 16:21), who became the bishops respectively of Tarsus and Iconium; Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, who was a disciple of St. John; Evodius of Antioch, numbered among the Seventy Apostles and second Bishop