

# The Church Is Visible and One

## A Critique of Protestant Ecclesiology

by Patrick Barnes

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

**Ephesians 4:6**

And I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church . . .

### **The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed**

And if ever you are sojourning in cities, inquire not simply where the Lord's House is (for the other sects of the profane also attempt to call their own dens houses of the Lord), nor merely where the church is, but where is the Catholic\* Church.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XVIII**

## Introduction

Protestant Christians around the world are steadily becoming more aware of the reality of the Church. This century has especially seen a tremendous reawakening to this aspect of Christianity. “What is the Church?” is often *the* question that drives Protestants to either Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy. Many Protestants who begin reading the the writings of the early Church—especially works like Tertullian's *Prescription Against the Heretics*, St. Cyprian's *Unity of the Catholic Church*, or St. Irenaeus's *Against the Heresies*—, or who begin to ponder the implications of 1 Timothy 3:15,<sup>1</sup> soon begin to realize that the concept of unity with the One Visible Church is central to Christianity. All other doctrinal issues and disagreements are downstream of the issue of the Church, for She is the “pillar and ground of the Truth.” Find the Church and one finds the fullness of Truth.<sup>2</sup>

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\*Catholic does not mean *Roman Catholic*, but denotes both wholeness (literally, “according to the whole”—fullness of the apostolic faith) and secondarily, universality (i.e., St. Vincent's canon—“what is believed always, everywhere, and by all”). The Orthodox Church is often called The Holy Catholic Orthodox Church.

<sup>1</sup> But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, *the pillar and ground of the truth* (KJV, emphasis mine).

<sup>2</sup> For the Orthodox,

*Christianity is precisely the Church, in the fullness of her life and 'existence.'* One may even ask, should a systematic exposition of the Christian Faith not start precisely with at least a preliminary 'essay' on the Church, because it is *in the Church* that the 'deposit of Faith' has

The question of the Church was certainly the catalyst in my own journey, especially after reading the Ignatius Press edition of Thomas Howard's delightful book *Evangelical Is Not Enough*. In the Postscript he reflects upon the steps that took him from Canterbury to Rome by saying that it was "the same old story which one finds in Newman, Knox, Chesterton, and all others who have made this move. The question, What is the Church? becomes, finally, intractable; and one finds oneself unable to offer any compelling reasons why the phrase 'one, holy, catholic, and apostolic,' which we all say in the Creed, is to be understood in any way other than the way in which it was understood for 1500 years." If Howard introduced the question to me, the hammer that drove home the nails came, ironically, from yet another encounter with a Roman Catholic book. To this day Yves Congar's monumental *Tradition and Traditions* remains one of the most important books I have ever read besides the Bible; for it thoroughly convinced me that the Bible, Tradition, and the Church are one majestic tapestry woven and preserved by the Holy Spirit. When I finally became aware of the reality of this undivided, historical and visible Church I knew I could no longer remain separate from Her. I was not in the Church, and I needed to be.

Most of what will I will say below assumes that the concept of an ancient *consensus fidelium* carries some weight with the reader. For those who are of the opinion that the God-enlightened Fathers of the Church are not important, or who are under the sway of liberal scholars who champion theological relativism, there is probably not much common ground for discussion. One Protestant I have corresponded with, a doctoral candidate studying under Thomas Oden at Drew University, is probably representative of many when he said:

"As for the 'proper interpretation' of Nicea being, by definition, that interpretation which the Church has given it: First, that assertion so clearly begs the question that it leaves one suspecting whether there is any room left for dialogue at all. But second, and more importantly, I would contend with your assumption about the nature of Tradition. The Creed is itself an aspect of Tradition and, as such, leaves room for a spectrum of interpretations. For you to demand that there is only one possible interpretation of the Creed is certainly counter to the way [in] which that same Tradition has interacted with

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been kept until now through all the ages of her historical existence, and it is *by the authority* of the Church that all Christian doctrines and beliefs have been, and still are, handed down and commended from generation to generation, and are again received precisely in obedience to the Church and in loyalty to her continuous and identical Tradition. Protestant theologians usually preface their systems with a treatise on the Word of God, i.e. on Scripture, and it seems to be a very logical move for them. "Catholics" sometimes follow the same plan, only, they would of course add "Tradition" to "Scripture." In actual fact, it is nothing but a "treatise on the Church" in disguise, offered as an indispensable "*Prolegomenon*" to the theological system as such. (Richard Haugh, ed., *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, vol. 14, *Ecumenism II: A Historical Approach* (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1972-79, p. 10).

See also the superb little book by Archbishop and Holy New Martyr Ilarion (Troitsky), *Christianity or the Church?* (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1985).

itself. The whole methodology of the Councils permits a breadth of freedom within certain conceptual parameters. We are not all required to affirm the same interpretation of the Creed, just the same Creed.”

Is there any common ground for discussion? It is difficult to say.

Another way of stating my position is that I unapologetically presuppose that the Church is indeed “the pillar and ground of the Truth,” that the Mind of the Church (the *consensus fidelium*) has something authoritative to say to us today, that what She says is clearly discernible, and that Her Tradition is timeless and unchanging.

Now, by “unchanging” we Orthodox do not mean “static” or “institutionalized,” as those misinformed about the Church’s understanding of Tradition often think. What is meant is that there can be no doctrinal changes to the Apostolic deposit. Only new *expressions* of the “faith once delivered to the saints,” expressions typically formulated in response to attacks on the Church’s beliefs, are even *considered*, let alone *adopted*.<sup>3</sup> St. Vincent of Lerins, in his masterful fifth century treatise entitled *The Commonitory*, perfectly expresses the platform from which I make my presentation:

I have often then inquired earnestly and attentively of very many men eminent for sanctity and learning, how and by what sure and so to speak universal rule I may be able to distinguish the truth of Catholic faith from the falsehood of heretical pravity; and I have always, and in almost every instance, received an answer to this effect: That whether I or any one else should wish to detect the frauds and avoid the snares of heretics as they rise, and to continue sound and complete in the Catholic faith, we must, the Lord helping, fortify our own belief in two ways; *first, by the authority of the Divine Law, and then, by the*

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<sup>3</sup> The Orthodox always regarded the unchanging persistence of the Orthodox Church in Sacred Tradition as her boast. On the contrary, the heterodox--with exceptions, especially in recent times--regarded this persistence as a sign of decline, as a sign of deficiency in her inner life. In particular, the Protestants hurled the reproof that the Orthodox Church is “dead” and likened her to a “petrified mummy.” This demonstrates the ignorance which the heterodox customarily have about the true essence of Christianity, and shows to what degree they confuse the revealed faith with the different *worldly* systems, with the different *human* contrivances and creations. Since in the *crafts* and the *sciences* there is a continuous development and perfection, they think the same thing ought to happen in the Christian religion, that here too there should be a continuous revision, change, and replacement of the old by the new--in a word, “modernization.” Looking at Christianity rationally, they misunderstand its revelatory character and demote it to the level of the systems which the mind of man has formed on the basis of reason and observations of the five senses.” Constantine Cavarnos, *Orthodox Tradition and Modernism* (Etna, CA: The Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1992), 15.

Unfortunately it is beyond the scope of this paper to explain the Orthodox view of Tradition or the development of dogma. A recommended starting point is Archimandrite [now Archbishop] Chrysostomos and Archimandrite [now Bishop] Auxentios, *Scripture and Tradition* (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1994). See also Florovsky’s *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, *Bible, Church, Tradition*, and Bishop KALLISTOS Ware’s *The Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Press, 1994 (1990)), Ch. 10 “Holy Tradition: The Source of the Orthodox Faith.”

*Tradition of the Catholic Church.*

But here some one perhaps will ask, Since the canon of Scripture is complete, and sufficient of itself for everything, and more than sufficient, what need is there to join with it the authority of the Church's interpretation? For this reason—because, owing to the depth of Holy Scripture, all do not accept it in one and the same sense, but one understands its words in one way, another in another; so that it seems to be capable of as many interpretations as there are interpreters. For Novatian expounds it one way, Sabellius another, Donatus another, Arius, Eunomius, Macedonius, another, Photinus, Apollinaris, Priscillian, another, Iovinian, Pelagius, Celestius, another, lastly, Nestorius another. Therefore, it is very necessary, on account of so great intricacies of such various error, that the rule for the right understanding of the prophets and apostles should be framed in accordance with the standard of Ecclesiastical and Catholic interpretation.

Moreover, in the Catholic Church itself, all possible care must be taken, *that we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all.* For that is truly and in the strictest sense “Catholic,” which, as the name itself and the reason of the thing declare, comprehends all universally. *This rule we shall observe if we follow universality, antiquity, consent.* We shall follow universality if we confess that one faith to be true, which the whole Church throughout the world confesses; antiquity, if we in no wise depart from those interpretations which it is manifest were notoriously held by our holy ancestors and fathers; consent, in like manner, if in antiquity itself we adhere to the consentient definitions and determinations of all, or at the least of almost all priests and doctors.

What then will a Catholic Christian do, if a small portion of the Church have cut itself off from the communion of the universal faith? What, surely, but prefer the soundness of the whole body to the unsoundness of a pestilent and corrupt member? *What, if some novel contagion seek to infect not merely an insignificant portion of the Church, but the whole? Then it will be his care to cleave to antiquity, which at this day cannot possibly be seduced by any fraud of novelty.*

But what, if in antiquity itself there be found error on the part of two or three men, or at any rate of a city or even of a province? Then it will be his care by all means, to prefer the decrees, if such there be, of an ancient General Council to the rashness and ignorance of a few. But what, if some error should spring up on which no such decree is found to bear? Then he must collate and consult and interrogate the opinions of the ancients, of those, namely, who, though living in divers times and places, yet continuing in the communion and faith of the one Catholic Church, stand forth acknowledged and approved authorities: and whatsoever he shall ascertain to have been held, written, taught, not by one or two of these only, but by all, equally, with one consent, openly, frequently, persistently, that he must understand that he himself also is to believe without any doubt or hesitation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *The Commonitory: For Antiquity and Universality of the Catholic Faith Against the Profane Novelties of All Heresies*, Ch. II-III, emphases mine. All Patristic citations are henceforth taken from *A Select Library of the Ante-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, and the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> series*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994 [1886]). These collections are readily available from a number of sources, including the Internet. Because of this, I will cite only the Chapter

In this same vein, and echoing 1 Timothy 3:15, St. Irenaeus wrote:

But, again, when we refer them to that tradition which originates from the apostles, [and] which is preserved by means of the succession of presbyters in the Churches, they object to tradition, saying that they themselves are wiser not merely than the presbyters, but even than the apostles, because they have discovered the unadulterated truth. . .

It is within the power of all, therefore, in every Church, who may wish to see the truth, to contemplate clearly the tradition of the apostles manifested throughout the whole world; and we are in a position to reckon up those who were by the apostles instituted bishops in the Churches, and [to demonstrate] the succession of these men to our own times; those who neither taught nor knew of anything like what these [heretics] rave about. . . .

In this order, and by this succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the apostles, and the preaching of the truth, have come down to us. And this is most abundant proof that there is one and the same vivifying faith, which has been preserved in the Church from the apostles until now, and handed down in truth.<sup>5</sup>

In short, accusations of “begging the question” will fall on deaf ears. The Church—as it has been historically expressed and understood in the Nicene Creed—is an object of *faith*. In this sense, belief in the Church is no different than belief in God. The Church as an infallible “pillar and ground of the Truth” cannot be proven empirically. We are simply to believe *in* it.<sup>6</sup> Thus, my appeal to those men who have been hailed throughout the centuries by countless Christians as Doctors and Teachers of the Faith *par excellence* ultimately stems from my belief, or *faith in*, an indefectible Church—a Church that has an authoritative Mind and Tradition which has been formed and preserved by the activity of the Holy Spirit. My platform is in principle no different than a Protestant’s belief in an “infallible Bible” interpreted through the unbiblical lens of “*sola Scriptura*.”<sup>7</sup>

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and verse for each passage, and not the page number.

<sup>5</sup> *Against All Heresies*, Book III, 2:2, 3:1, 3:3, emphases mine.

<sup>6</sup> As Innocent (Clark) Carlton shows, “The Greek text of the Creed makes this clear. ‘We believe (*pisteuomen*)’ is followed by ‘in (*eis*)’ four times: *eis hena theon*, *eis hena kyrion*, *eis to pneuma to Hagion*, and *eis mian* . . . *Ekklesian*. The remaining articles of the Creed are clearly distinguished from the above by the introduction of new verbs: *Homologoumen* (We confess) and *Prosdokomen* (We look for). *The Way: What Every Protestant Should Know About the Orthodox Church* (Salisbury, MA: Regina Press, 1997), 202. Carlton is a convert to Orthodoxy from the Southern Baptist tradition.

<sup>7</sup> Oddly enough, this Reformation “pillar” is found nowhere in Holy Scripture. For a thorough critique of this Protestant doctrine see Fr. John Whiteford, *Sola Scriptura: An Orthodox Analysis of the Cornerstone of Reformed Theology* (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, 1996). Not surprisingly, none of the Creeds prior to the Reformation make any statements about the “infallibility” of Scripture, or necessary belief

At the outset, then, I wish to challenge Protestants to “Question Authority,” as the popular slogan goes. That is, I want them to see that their views do not rest on what the Church has always believed and confessed, but rather upon their own modern post-enlightenment understanding of things. This modern mindset is an inheritance from the well-intentioned Reformers who—in their attempt to bring the Church back to true Christianity, “pure and undefiled”—unfortunately became unwitting victims of the collapsing framework of late-medieval scholastic nominalism.<sup>8</sup> Shackled in a corrupt mindset that is alien to the Fathers of the Church, they developed a litany of doctrines that are nowhere to be found in the “Mind of the Church.”

## A Brief Overview of the Protestant Position

It is difficult to nail down a specific Protestant ecclesiology because there is so much disagreement within their broad, fragmented tradition. Even among Anglicans—who tend to have the most “catholic” ecclesiological views of any Protestant group—, there is much diversity. The Anglican Tradition has often been described by their own as “comprehensive.” Within Anglicanism one can find everything ranging from the “low church evangelical” view to the “high church Anglo-Catholic” view. The former group, which is very similar to most other Protestant sects (except, perhaps, the more “high church” Lutherans), would say that the episcopacy is merely of the *bene esse*, that is, beneficial, to the Church. The latter would generally argue for the more catholic position that the three-fold office is of the *esse* of the Church, that is, of Her very nature or essence. However, in both cases they hold to the “Branch Theory,” which states, according to the universally respected *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*,

that, though the Church may have fallen into schism within itself and its several provinces or groups of provinces be out of communion with each other, each may yet be a “branch” of the one Church of Christ, provided that it continues to hold the faith of the original undivided Church and to maintain the Apostolic Succession of its bishops. Such, it is contended by many Anglican theologians, is the condition of the Church at the present time, there being now three main branches, the Roman, the Eastern, and the Anglican Communions....<sup>9</sup>

Protestant groups whose tradition stems from the Continental Reformation tend to

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<sup>8</sup> On this thesis, see Bouyer, Louis, *The Spirit and Forms of Protestantism* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1961) and Mascall, E. L., *The Recovery of Unity: A Theological Approach* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1958), esp. Ch. 4.

<sup>9</sup> As cited by Fr. Gregory Mathewes-Green in his outstanding critique of this Anglican idea, “Whither the Branch Theory,” *Anglican/Orthodox Pilgrim*, Vol. 2, No. 4.

have an ecclesiology that can be summarized as follows:

Every denomination has in it some people who are truly Christian believers and other people who are not Christians. The *Body of Christ* or the *church* (the universal church, that is) is the collection of all individuals who believe in Jesus, are saved, and are going to heaven. The *church*, therefore, includes people from every denomination who are Christians (and excludes, of course, all who are not Christians, regardless of which denomination they belong to). The *church* is essentially an *invisible, spiritual* entity. We cannot see it. We cannot determine who is in the church by looking at the membership rolls of a particular denomination. Since the church is a *spiritual* entity, we should not necessarily expect to see a *visible* unity in the church. Therefore, a variety of denominations is no indication of essential disunity. If we wish to see unity in the church, we need simply to recognize that there are Christians in every denomination and to respect all Christians as our brothers and sisters in Christ, regardless of which denomination they belong to. . . Some who hold this view of unity in the church would admit that there *might* be disunity within the church, but that the existence of a multitude of denominations is not by itself enough evidence to conclude that there *is*, in fact, disunity in the church.<sup>10</sup>

The *New Dictionary of Theology*, considered by many Protestants to be an authoritative resource, says this under the topic of “Church: Distinguishing the aspects of the Church”:

There are organizations that have falsely claimed to be the church as well as churches that have become apostate. It is necessary to distinguish the true church, and to understand its nature and ministry. The church may be defined as God sees it, the so-called “church invisible.” This is composed of all whose

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<sup>10</sup> “The Unity of the Church”, by Mark Swearingen. Consider this important passage by Fr. Daniel Degyansky from his *Orthodox Christianity and the Spirit of Modern Ecumenism*:

The Protestants, to the extent that one can use such a sweeping term to describe the Reformed tradition, have a different notion of ecclesial unity. To the strict Calvinist, the universal Church is something invisible, “. . .the company of the elect, whose names are known only to God....[Other Protestants]...believe that the invisible ‘Church’ expresses itself in local congregations, and the sum of all such local congregations is the visible ‘Church.’” Some Lutherans (such as those in Scandanavia) still consider themselves to have Apostolic Succession and to be the inheritors of the Catholic Church, though this view is now being widely challenged by theologians. Yet other Protestants have a definition of the Church which is far more social than mystical and which fails to address ecclesiology from an historical perspective. Within this array of beliefs about the Church and what constitutes Christian unity, it is evident that Protestant ecclesiology differs greatly from that of the Orthodox Church.

(Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1992), 69. This is the best overview of ecumenism that I have read to date. For the Orthodox position on unity see The Oberlin Statement.

names are in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 21:27). The "church visible," on the other hand, is the church as we see it, the family of believers. This distinction guards against equating membership in the church visible with salvation, or, on the other hand, disregarding public identification with God's people.<sup>11</sup>

The following are comments were made to me by the aforementioned Protestant doctoral student:

I would deny that the Church is both invisibly one and visibly undivided. No: the Church *is* invisibly one and *is* visibly divided. I would deny that there is a single, visible community which alone can claim to be the one true Church. No: *no* single, visible community can make that claim. I would deny that there can be no schisms *within* the Church; there have been, and there might yet be. I would affirm, by contrast, that the various traditions which comprise Christendom are all aspects, 'branches' if you will, of the visible Church. They are visibly divided, but invisibly united. And it is the very mutuality of that invisible union that creates both the possibility and precondition for relationship, for dialogue, for joint social and charitable efforts.<sup>12</sup>

Summing up the main tenets of most Protestant ecclesiologies:

- The True Church is the invisible church, known only to God.
- The visible church can be divided.
- There is no necessary correlation between the visible and invisible church. Membership in a local body is merely helpful, but not essential, to one's salvation.
- The visible church is not indefectible or infallible; that is, no one church has the fullness of the truth. All have erred and will err.
- Episcopal government, the ancient three-fold order, is not of the essential nature of the visible church, but merely one allowable form of polity among many.
- Apostolic succession is of *faith alone*, not of *faith and order*.

This paper will provide an Orthodox critique of all but the last two "marks" of

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<sup>11</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, David Wright, and J.I. Packer, eds., *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 143.

<sup>12</sup> These thoughts are in keeping with arguably the most important doctrinal statement to emerge from the Reformation, the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. See Ch. 25, Articles II, IV, and V.



general Protestant ecclesiology.<sup>13</sup> I am not a trained theologian, but rather a “lay compiler and synthesizer.” There are no new or original thoughts here. I have merely attempted to collect excerpts from a variety of sources, hopefully compiling them in a legitimate and persuasive manner, thus making the ideas of these many authors more easily accessible. With Jordan Bajis’s permission I have used Chapter 9 from his book, *Common Ground: An Introduction to Eastern Christianity for the American Christian*, as a general framework for this paper. His comments, like mine, will not be indented, though his will have quotation marks and footnotes. I have also decided to quote heavily from Protestant authors who are widely acknowledged as experts in the field of Patristics and historical theology. I wanted to allow much room for Protestant scholars to speak about these issues to alleviate charges of ‘bias.’ Only in this sense could one say that my essay is unique.

## An Orthodox Critique

### *Trinitarian and Christological Methodology*

Before attempting a thorough critique of Protestant ecclesiology it is important to discuss the approach that Orthodox take to *all* theological issues. We are a “Church of the Fathers,” says Fr. George Dragas, Dean of Holy Cross Orthodox Theological Seminary. It is

... in the Fathers that we have the maintenance of the apostolic heritage, as the Fathers maintain the integrity of the Church by keeping the apostolic Faith and tradition. The dogmas of the Fathers, whether their accredited writings, or in their local and ecumenical synodal decisions, have no other intention but to keep the truth which the Lord gave and the apostles preached. Orthodox dogmatics and doctrine are thoroughly apostolic and patristic. They are not abstract ideas divorced from the persons of the Fathers, the apostles and Christ. Doctrine is the expression of this unbroken line of existence which belongs to the very being of the Church. The guarantee of this unbroken line of holy tradition and existence is none other than the Holy Paraclete given by Christ Himself to His Church, the Spirit of Life who grafts us all on to the one Body of Christ and makes us reside in the one Truth.<sup>14</sup>

This means not only that the *content* of our reflection on the nature of the Church must be consistent with Holy Tradition, but also our *methodology*. Our understanding of the Church must flow from the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of Christ. No other

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<sup>13</sup> The best introduction to the Orthodox position on these last two points is Fr. Gregory Rogers’s *Apostolic Succession*. Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, 1989. This is a must read for all those interested in ecclesiology and forms a companion document to this one.

<sup>14</sup> “Orthodox Ecclesiology in Outline,” originally published in the *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 26-3, 1981.

evolution of thought will suffice. I cannot resist once again quoting at length from Fr. Dragas's article:

The nature of the Church is to be understood as the Church of the Triune God. The Holy Trinity is the ultimate basis and source of the Church's existence and, as such, the Church is in the image and likeness of God. This being in the image of the blessed Trinity constitutes the mode of the Church's existence, which, in fact, reveals her nature. Being in God, the Church reflects on earth God's unity in Trinity. What is natural to God is given to the Church by grace.

The grace of the Trinity is the *starting point* for understanding the nature of the Church, and especially for her unity in multiplicity, as the Holy Spirit shares one life and one being. The three distinct and unique Persons are one in life and in nature. Similarly, the Church exhibits a parallel multiplicity of persons in unity of life and being. The difference between God and the Church is that, in the former, multiplicity in unity is the truth, whereas in the latter, this is only a participation in the truth. In patristic language the former is *ousia*, while the latter is *metousia*. The unity of the three divine Persons in life and being is, therefore, the prototype of the unity of the Church's persons in life and in being. As Christ Himself says in His prayer for the Church: "even as Thou O Father are in me and I in Thee, so they may be one, that the world may believe that Thou has sent me." The mark of unity is collegiality and love, and not subordination. Orthodox Triadology, based on the grace of the Trinity, supplies the basic ontological categories for Orthodox ecclesiology. The Church is an *eikon* of the Holy Trinity, a participation in the grace of God.

How does the Church participate in God's mystery and grace? How is *metousia Theou* ("participation in the essence of God") achieved? How does the Church become an *eikon* of the Holy Trinity? The answer, in its simplest form, is contained in the phrase "in and through Christ." Christ has established the bond between the image of the Triune God, and that which is made after the image, namely, the Church, mankind. In Christ we have both the *eikon* and the *kat' eikona* ("that which is according to the image"). Hence, we must say that the Church is the Church of the Triune God as *the Church of Christ*. The link between the Holy Trinity and Christology, that is, between theology and economy, demands a similar link in ecclesiology. The Church is in the image of the Triune God, and participates in the grace of the Trinity inasmuch as She is in Christ and partakes of His grace. The unity of persons in life and being cannot be achieved apart from this economy of Christ, and we here encounter what the New Testament calls the "Body of Christ."<sup>15</sup>

"The Church as a whole is an icon of God the Trinity, reproducing on earth the

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

mystery of unity in diversity.” This is manifested in many ways, e.g. the unity in one body of individual people from every nation under heaven (Acts 2:5), independent autocephalous churches forming one Church, conciliar episcopal government that recognizes one bishop as “first among equals,” and the Orthodox emphasis on councils.<sup>16</sup>

The focus of this paper, however, will be on the *Christological* aspect of the Church, the Church as the extension of the Incarnation. For Orthodox Christians the Church is the “continuous presence of the Redeemer in the world”<sup>17</sup> Who said that He would never leave us nor forsake us.

Jordan Bajis states that “the Church’s nature and essence are totally dependent upon His nature and essence. For this reason, one’s perception of the Church must rest squarely on who Christ is. ‘The nature of the Church is the nature of Christ because it is His body’. A faulty view of Him will, therefore, yield an equally defective view of the Church.”<sup>18</sup>

This will become increasingly clear as we move on, especially in the excerpt by the Protestant scholar T. F. Torrance, below. But for now, I continue with Mr. Bajis:

“One of the most significant Church councils pertaining to the doctrine of Christ was the Council of Chalcedon (451). In its profession, we gain not only a great insight into the nature of Christ, but also a perception of the Church as well. ‘The doctrine of the Church is not an ‘appendix’ to Christology, and not just an extrapolation of the ‘Christological principle,’ as it has been often assumed. There is much more than an ‘analogy.’ Ecclesiology, in the Orthodox view is an integral part of Christology. One can evolve the whole body of Orthodox Dogma out of the Dogma of Chalcedon’.<sup>19</sup> The following is an excerpt from one of [the Council’s] declarations:”

‘[Christ is] to be acknowledged in two natures [divine and human], without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way abolished because of the union, but rather the characteristic property of each nature being preserved, and concurring into one Person and one subsistence, not as if Christ were parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and only-begotten God, Word, Lord, Jesus Christ; even as the Prophets from the beginning spoke

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<sup>16</sup> Ware, pp. 240-241.

<sup>17</sup> Florovsky’s *Collected Works*, Vol. 14, *Ecumenism II: An Historical Approach*, p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> Bajis, p. 119, citing Fr. Serge Verhovskoy, ‘The Highest Authority in the Church,’ *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, (Crestwood, NY, 1960), vol. 4, no. 2-3, p. 81.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 129, citing Fr. George Florovsky; ‘The Ethos of the Orthodox Church,’ *Ecumenical Review*, XII, 2, 1960, p. 197.

concerning Him . . . ’<sup>20</sup>

“Just as Christ, the God-Man, has both a divine and a human nature, so the Church likewise manifests divinity and humanity. Of course, Christ’s humanity differs from the humanity constituting the Church in that her members are not yet complete and perfect. This, however, in no way detracts from the fact that the mystery of Christ’s presence fills the Church. As it is within the Person of Christ, the Church’s human will lives and acts in cooperation [or, synergy; cf. Phil. 2.13-14] with the divine. Such a cooperation results in the Christian becoming more and more like Him Who is the Church’s Head. . . .”<sup>21</sup>

### ***Origins of the “Church is Invisible” Doctrine***

Bajis continues: “Discussing the institutional element of the Church naturally brings up another question: ‘Is the true Church visible or invisible?’ In general, the Reformation tradition promoted the doctrine that the true Church was the invisible Church. They, following Augustine, differentiated between a visible and invisible Church, ‘. . . asserting the true Church to be invisible.’ In essence, the Reformers affirmed that the nature of the Church is dominated by two fundamental convictions: 1) a necessary individual response to the Spirit’s invitation and 2) because of the Fall, whatever institutional forms a church will take will bear the marks of the sinfulness of their creators.<sup>22</sup> According to this teaching, God was the only One Who could identify the real Christian from the false; no religious structure could be trusted to make the recognition.”

“The idea of the invisible Church is found in Augustine, *City of God*; Wycliffe, *De ecclesia*; Luther, *Preface to Revelation*; Calvin, *Institutes IV*, 1, 7 . . . The thought that is uppermost is not to minimize the importance of church membership, but to recognize the possibility of hypocrisy and deceit. In the last analysis, those who belong to God are visible to God alone. Membership of the true Church is a fact which is not visible to man. The idea recalls the statement of 2 Tim. 2.19: ‘The Lord knows who are his.’”<sup>23</sup>

Bajis states that the seeds for the “visible-invisible Church” doctrine were found in St. Augustine’s writings, especially the *City of God*, with its inherent spiritual-material dualism.

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 129, citing J. Stevenson, *Creeds, Councils and Controversies* (London, SPCK, 1966), p. 337.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p. 119-120.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 129-130, citing William A. Scott, *Historical Protestantism: An Historical Introduction to Protestant Theology*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1971), p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p. 130, citing Colin Brown, ed. *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, “Church”, L. Coenan, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), p. 299.

“This perspective viewed the invisible things of the Spirit as distinct, separate and unrelated to the material things of creation. ‘In the West . . . that dualism was actively brought back in a powerful theoretical form, in St. Augustine’s far-reaching distinction between *mundus intelligibilis* and the *mundus sensibilis*, reinforced by a somewhat Neo-platonic and Ptolemaic outlook upon the universe, which came to be built into the whole fabric of Western thought. . . . It also had the effect of bifurcating [dividing into two parts] the religious wholeness of the Judeo-Christian tradition into a dualism of visible and invisible, outward and inward spheres of experience, which then needed to be coordinated through a system of [mediatorial] causal connections. . . . the religious consciousness fostered by the monastic orders (especially Augustinian and Franciscan), had the effect of widening the dualism within the Roman Catholic Church as community of believers and the Church as identified with the ecclesiastical ruling class.’”<sup>24</sup>

However, as Pelikan observes, this ‘invisible Church’ idea didn’t come from *The City of God* alone:

In Augustine’s theology of grace infant baptism proved not only the universal necessity of grace, but also the objective mediation of grace. If the grace of God was sovereign in its predestinating efficacy, God could not be said to be absolutely bound *by* the Church and the sacraments; but he was bound *to* them. The mystery of grace was not resolved by simply determining who belonged to the external fellowship of the Church or who had been baptized. It was necessary to “distinguish the visible holy sacrament, which can exist both in the good and in the bad . . . from the invisible unction of charity, which is the peculiar property of the good.”

[Augustine’s] doctrine of the Church was more seriously affected by his view of predestination than was his doctrine of the sacraments. It was by no means self-evident that those who “participate physically in the sacraments” were to be regarded as members of the Body of Christ, the Church. For “in the ineffable prescience of God, many who seem to be on the inside are nevertheless in fact on the outside; therefore the true Church consisted of “the fixed number of the saints predestined before the foundation of the world,” even though some of them were now wallowing in heresy or vice. These belong to the city of God, predestined and elected by grace, aliens here below but citizens above. When the Church was defined this way, it was valid to say that God had none who were outside the communion of the Church.

Furthermore, St. Augustine actually intentioned the *opposite* of what later Reformers took him to mean:

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 130, citing T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays Toward Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West*, (Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), pp. 31, 37, 38.

The definition of the Church as the “number of the predestined” was to figure prominently in the polemics of the late Middle Ages and the Reformation against the institutional Church, but in Augustine’s theology it had precisely the opposite function. It enabled him to accept a distinction between the members of the empirical Catholic Church and the company of those who would be saved, while at the same time he insisted that the empirical Catholic Church was the only one in which salvation was dispensed; “for it is the Church that gives birth to all.” Although God predestined, “we, on the basis of what each man is right now, inquire whether today they are to be counted as members of the Church.” It was to the Church as now constituted that one was to look for grace, for guidance, and for authority. Those who accepted the “authority of the Scriptures as preeminent” should also acknowledge “that authority which from the time of the [earthly] presence of Christ, through the dispensation of the apostles and through a regular succession of bishops in their seats, has been preserved to our own day throughout the world.” This authority of orthodox catholic Christendom, “inaugurated by miracles, nourished by hope, enlarged by charity, established by antiquity,” was so powerful as even to validate the very authority of the Bible. “For my part,” Augustine declared, “I should not believe the gospel except as moved by the authority of the Catholic Church”<sup>25</sup> . . . In that institution of salvation the principle channels of grace were the sacraments. . . . “There is no other valid means of making Christians and remitting sins, except by causing men to become believers by the institution of Christ and the Church, and through the sacraments,” and “no man can hope for either salvation or eternal life without baptism and the Lord’s body and blood.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> As Jaroslav Pelikan remarks in Vol. 4 of his *The Christian Tradition* series, p. 315, during the Reformation this “classic statement about the gospel and the Church had to be inverted to read: ‘If I did not believe the gospel, I would never believe the Church, since the Church is built on the gospel and not the gospel on the Church.’” Furthermore, in Vol. 5, p. 264ff, Pelikan underscores the fact that “the interpretation of Scripture, not only its identification (that is, in the formation of the Canon), was the import of the saying of Augustine, as the sorry spectacle of the eucharistic controversy was making clear.” He then goes on to list the great variety of opinions that the Reformers ended up holding with regards to this central Christian doctrine. The reader would do well to read this section of Pelikan’s volume.

<sup>26</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition, Vol. 1, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1972), pp. 302-6, citing Augustine’s *On the Merits and Remission of Sins*, 3, 12, 21 and 1, 24, 34. Archbishop Ilarion makes the same conclusion: “In his works against the Donatists, Augustine argues in detail for the validity of schismatic baptism. If, however, it is possible to preserve true teaching outside the Church and if even the sacraments performed in schism from the Church are valid, then is the Church really necessary? Is salvation not possible outside the Church? To all these questions a negative reply is given in the system of Augustine. He ascribes Christian life, which leads to salvation, only to the Church. Outside the Church this life cannot exist.” (*Christianity or the Church?* Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1985, p. 23). See also my forthcoming book *On the Status of*

The famous Protestant theologian / historian J.N.D. Kelly confirms this view and further elaborates upon it:

In appropriate circumstances grace can certainly be had outside [the Church] by means of God's direct, invisible action, as the case of the centurion Cornelius recorded in *Acts* demonstrates; but the strict condition is that the recipient must not attempt to bypass the visible means of grace. It goes without saying that Augustine identifies the Church with the universal Catholic Church of his day, with its hierarchy and sacraments, and with its center at Rome.<sup>27</sup>

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*Heterodox Christians: A Study of the Implications of Orthodox Ecclesiology.*

Augustine's views regarding the "validity of sacraments" outside of the Church stems from his doctrine of "created grace," which has never been accepted in the East. For an overview of this, with excellent footnotes and bibliography, consult Fr. Gregory Rogers's outstanding booklet *Apostolic Succession* (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, 1989). Tony Zamora provides this helpful summary of one of Fr. Gregory's main points:

"In his booklet *Apostolic Succession*, Fr. Gregory Rogers makes the case that the East's response to the Donatist schism was different from the West's. Both East and West agreed that the moral character of the celebrant did not invalidate the mysteries, but they approached it from a different perspective of grace.

The Western view, shaped almost entirely by Augustine, is that grace inheres in individuals, and the Church is the means through which this grace is dispensed. Orthodoxy, on the other hand, maintains that grace inheres in a community (the Church), and one partakes of that grace by participating in the life and activity of the Church. The Church is the community of grace rather than the dispenser of grace to individuals. Orthodox see grace as the dynamic life of God himself rather than an instrument that God uses. This life emanates from Christ and is what enlivens his body, the Church. Therefore grace is primarily communal.

Orthodox see this clearly in our doctrine of Apostolic Succession. We emphatically maintain that the succession only exists (and that it only makes sense) within the community of the Church. This reflects the Orthodox communal view of grace. It seems that the corresponding statement about baptism is the most Orthodox: that baptism is a sacramental action of the community that unites an outsider with that community. Similar statements can be made about the other mysteries: they are communal actions of the Church and can be understood only in context of the community. By their very definition as actions and celebrations of the community, they cannot exist outside the community.

The Western view is quite different. In general, the West sees sacramental grace as residing in the individual. For instance, they maintain that ordination makes an indelible mark upon the soul of the ordained. This solves the Donatist problem, since one's sacraments are valid if one has the mark on one's soul (a valid ordination), but it also means that, in the Western view, valid sacraments can exist outside the Church. [The Orthodox solution to the Donatist problem is that all sacraments celebrated by the community are valid (by definition) regardless of the moral character of the celebrant, but if one leaves the community one no longer participates in the actions and life of the community.]"

<sup>27</sup> *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper, 1978), pp. 412-3.

St. Augustine clearly viewed the Church as both mystical and visible. However, as Kelly observes, during the Donatist controversy he

was lead to introduce a refinement on this distinction between the “visible and the invisible Church” as he worked out his doctrine of predestination in order to answer the charges of the schismatics that the Church is to be completely holy in all Her members. This development “transferred the whole problem of the Church’s nature to an altogether different plane. Augustine never attempted to harmonize his two conceptions, that distinguishing the Church as a historical institution from the true Church of those really devoted to Christ and manifesting His spirit, and that identifying Christ’s body with the fixed number of the elect known to God alone. Indeed, it may be doubted whether any synthesis was ultimately possible, for if the latter doctrine is taken seriously the notion of the institutional Church ceases to have any validity.”<sup>28</sup>

This brings us full circle to Pelikan’s statement made earlier that this distinction in “Augustine’s theology had precisely the opposite function” of what he intended: to answer the charges of the Donatists and to preserve the visible unity of the Church. This is one of the seeds planted unwittingly by St. Augustine that bore bad fruit during the Reformation and was used for exactly what Kelly notes above: to undermine the validity of the institutional Church.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 416-7.

<sup>29</sup> Augustine is undoubtedly a Saint in the Orthodox Church. His theology has errors, but so did the writings of St. Gregory of Nyssa, who espoused a form of universalism. There are, however, some in the Church who take what many consider as an unbalanced approach towards this saint. The Rev. Dr. Michael Azkoul, an Orthodox scholar on Augustine, insists that the Bishop of Hippo’s “theology is largely responsible for the separation of the West from the Orthodox Church. ‘By his doctrine, writes H. Reuter, ‘Augustine prepared for the separation of the East and West.’ B.B. Warfield agrees, saying that ‘it was Augustine who imprinted upon the West . . . a character so specific as naturally to bring the separation of the Church in its train.’” See *Augustine of Hippo: An Orthodox Christian Perspective*. Available from Eighth Day Books (800)841-2541 or Synaxis Press, 37323 Hawkins Road, Dewdney, B.C., V0M-1H0, Canada. Archbishop Chrysostomos rightly criticized these excesses in a review of Fr. Michael’s book *The Teachings of the Holy Orthodox Church*, vol. 1, *God, Creation, Old Israel, Christ in The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 32 (1987), 100-103. See also the very balanced work by Fr. Seraphim Rose called *The Place of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church* (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1996 [1983]). In the latest edition an appendix has been added that includes an important correspondence between Fr. Seraphim and Fr. Michael. The problem with Augustine is not necessarily with him *per se*, but with what his followers have done with his variegated writings (i.e., producing an *Augustinism*). For example, Jaroslav Pelikan observes that

[T]he Reformation of the sixteenth century has repeatedly, and to some degree accurately, been interpreted as a movement in which the anti-Pelagian doctrines of Augustine about the necessity of grace were used to attack the anti-Donatist doctrines of Augustine about the mediation of grace. . . In each of these theological controversies both sides claimed to be defending the Augustinian heritage and to be recovering the true Augustine. Both sides were



## ***The Reformation: A Harvest of Bad Seeds***

“Luther, echoing Augustine’s dualism some thousand years later, not only asserted that the true Church was the invisible one, but that the visible and the invisible Church may be held in outright opposition to each other: ‘As Luther puts it, the Creed says ‘I believe in one Holy Church,’ not ‘I see one Holy Church.’ But this distinction cannot be maintained. For although Fathers such as Origen, Jerome, and Augustine, agreed that the Church contains both false and true members, and that the latter constitute the *corpus Christi verum*, they still see the Church as a visible community with external marks which distinguish it from heretical and schismatic bodies.’<sup>30</sup> Ulrich Zwingli, a key figure of both the Reformed and Anabaptist traditions, affirmed that because only God knew who He had elected to salvation, the true Church’s membership would of necessity be invisible. The logical implication of this reasoning was that unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity applied only to this specified ‘mystical’ body’.”<sup>31</sup>

Pelikan cuts to the heart of the matter during the Reformation.

At every stage and on every issue of the defense of the Roman Catholic faith against the Reformers, and more pointedly after the issuance of the *Augsburg Confession* in 1530, it became evident to all that, just as in the fifteenth century, there was one issue implicit within all the other issues: the doctrine of authority. To the erstwhile “Defender of the Faith” against Luther, Cardinal Pole could not put the question: “What validity does the practice of the Church have for you?” Having listed the three topics of his defense against Bucer—the Eucharist, the saints, and celibacy—another writer continued: “To these a fourth has been added in my epistle, namely, the authority of the Church, which is so necessary in this dispute that without it you cannot assert anything that is sure

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right, and both sides were wrong. (Vol. I, p. 331)

Fr. John Meyendorff comments in his essay “The Significance of the Reformation,” that

there is no doubt that the Reformation was a great movement of liberation from the false categories imprisoning the Christian gospel. But in rejecting the doctrines and the institutions which were considered as created intermediaries of grace, the Reformers—it seems—were unaware of a christology and an ecclesiology other than the Augustinian and the scholastic. An Orthodox theologian can say, therefore, that they rejected not the catholic tradition of the Church, but its one-sided and corrupt form. (*Catholicity and the Church*, [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1983], p. 76)

<sup>30</sup> Bajis, p. 130, citing Methodios Fouyas, *Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Anglicanism* (Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 116. See also Hans J. Hillerbrand, *Men and Ideas in the Sixteenth Century* (Chicago, Rand McNally, College Publishing Company, 1969), p. 76.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p.121, citing Bernard M.G. Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Reformation* (NY, Longham Inc., 1981), p. 103.

and firm.” With it, however, “whatever there is of disagreement and controversy between us could be easily settled.” . . . Therefore although the Protestants seemed to accept all the articles of the Creed, they had rejected the article, “I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church,” upon which “the entire Creed depends.”<sup>32</sup>

Pelikan then describes the “Protestant attempt to exploit the variants of Cyprian’s *On the Unity of the Church* . . .

Although the “sheep” whom Peter was commanded to “feed” were the elect of whom Christ said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them,” his rule over the Church was not confined to the elect. The shepherds whom Christ appointed were not hidden, but known to all; hence it was appropriate to ask the Protestants “whether the flock of sheep over which Christ set the known shepherds was his Church or not.” If they replied in the affirmative, as they must, then it followed that it was mistaken to define the Church as only the company of the elect, which had been “the error of the Wycliffites and the Hussites.” Otherwise, what concrete entity could Christ have had in mind when he commanded “Tell it to the Church”? (Matt. 18.17). As the mystical Body of Christ, governed by the Holy Spirit, the Catholic Church was nevertheless “publicly known,” not “hidden.” Of course it was not a building made of stone; but it was the visible, institutional, hierarchical Church that was called “the pillar of truth” (1 Tim. 3.15). The promise of indefectibility (Eph. 5.27) did not pertain only to a Church that was empirically “without spot,” which for that matter was not present among the Protestants either, but to ‘this Church on earth, which is still engaged in warfare.’ Any other ‘church’ was nothing more than a Platonic idea and a chimera. Against the Radicals Luther made such statements as: ‘A thousand years ago you and I did not exist, yet the Church was preserved without us’; this was an appeal to the institutional and even papal Church, not to the ‘hidden’ Church of the elect. Thus the Reformers had to admit that the Church was one and that it had existed before they ever came along, although now they were opposing its institutions.”<sup>33</sup>

In another volume of his *Christian Tradition* series Pelikan states, when discussing the Reformation, that

“this reassertion of the Augustinian case against Donatism took its inspiration from Augustine’s conviction that the unity of the Church—its ‘universality, antiquity, and consensus’—must be paramount. In 1 Corinthians Paul had warned against schism, in Ephesians against ‘heretical deserters,’ and Augustine

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<sup>32</sup> Pelikan, Vol. 5, pp. 262-3.

<sup>33</sup> Pelikan, Vol. 5, pp. 271-2; see also pp. 342-3.

had warned against those who accepted the authority of Scripture had violated unity. Now, with the growing 'internal disorders of Christendom,' it was incumbent on all parties to recognize that, evil as the abuses in the Church were, they were not nearly so dangerous as schism and heresy. If no other argument for communion under one kind availed, there still remained the question of whether the restoration of the chalice [to the laity] was worth the price of schism. . . . Thus to the Protestant emphasis on word and sacraments as marks of the Church, correct though it was, it was necessary to add the mark of unity; for "it was not from these marks . . . but from unity itself, which is indivisible, that the Church has been . . . transmitted to us from its first origins," and Christ had instituted the hierarchy to preserve unity. Diversity was one thing, schism quite another, and Luther was "the author of schism." As Augustine had said and as Luther had once agreed, there was no graver sin than sectarianism, which could not be justified even by the supposed centrality of the gospel. Augustine himself had confessed that he would not have believed the gospel if he had not been moved by the authority of the Catholic Church.<sup>34</sup>

Bajis summarizes: "Generally speaking, contemporary Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism are very much in sympathy with the Reformed and Zwinglian perspective. The true Church is something mystical, spiritual, unknowable, and 'heavenly,' whereas the 'earthly' Church, whose membership is composed of both Christians and non-Christians, is but a passing, fallen institution. Certainly those who are members of 'physical' churches can receive encouragement, teaching, and moral discipline through them, but only one's membership in the heaven-based Church has any eternal significance."

### ***The Church Fathers Speak***

Compare the Protestant mentality with the writings of the Fathers:

We believe also in the holy Church, that is, the Catholic Church; for heretics and schismatics call their own congregations churches. But heretics violate the faith itself by a false opinion about God; schismatics, however, withdraw from fraternal love by hostile separations, although they believe the same things we do. Consequently, neither heretics nor schismatics belong to the Catholic Church; not heretics, because the Church loves God; and not schismatics, because the Church loves neighbor.<sup>35</sup>

The Bride of Christ [the Church] cannot be defiled. She is inviolate and chaste. She knows but one home, and with a chaste modesty She guards the sanctity of

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<sup>34</sup> Pelikan, Vol. 5, pp. 273-4.

<sup>35</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Faith and the Creed*, X, 21 (from Jurgens, Vol. III, p. 44).

one bedchamber. It is She that keeps us for God, She that seals for the kingdom the sons whom She bore. Whoever is separated from the Church and is joined to an adulteress is separated from the promises of the Church; nor will he that forsakes the Church of Christ attain to the rewards of Christ. He is an alien, a worldling, and an enemy. He cannot have God for his Father who does not have the Church as his Mother. If anyone outside the ark of Noah was able to escape, then perhaps someone outside the pale of the Church may escape . . . The Lord says, "The Father and I are one" (John 10.30); and again, it is written of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, "And the three are one." (1 John 5.7)

Does anyone believe that in the Church this unity which proceeds from the divine stability and which is welded together after the heavenly patterns, can be divided, and can be separated by the parting asunder of opposing wills? Whoever holds not fast to this unity holds not to the law of God; neither does he keep faith with the Father and the Son, nor does he have life and salvation.<sup>36</sup>

. . . and they are the Church who are a people united to the priest, and the flock which adheres to its pastor. Whence you ought to know that the bishop is in the Church, and the Church in the bishop; and if any one be not with the bishop, that he is not in the Church, and that those flatter themselves in vain who creep in, not having peace with God's priests, and think that they communicate secretly with some; while the Church, which is Catholic and one, is not cut nor divided, but is indeed connected and bound together by the cement of priests who cohere with one another.<sup>37</sup>

Earlier in volume 1 of his *Christian Tradition* series, Pelikan remarked that,

[Cyprian] cited it as a self-evident axiom that there was no salvation outside the Church. Hence it was imperative that the unity of the Church be preserved, and Cyprian devoted his most famous treatise to this theme. The unity of the Church, like its holiness, was to be found in the bishops, in their unity with one another, affirmed by the words of Jesus to Peter in Matthew 16.18-19. . . But the debate over the "papal" vs. the "episcopal" exegesis of Matthew 16.18-19 [there are two versions of Cyprian's *The Unity of the Catholic Church*, the interpretation of which has been hotly debated over the centuries] should not obscure the more fundamental point shared by both kinds of exegesis: the indispensibility of the empirical unity of the Church, "this holy mystery of oneness, this unbreakable bond of close-knit harmony . . . portrayed in the Gospel by our Lord Jesus Christ's coat, which was not divided or cut at all . . . [For] that man

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<sup>36</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *The Unity of the Catholic Church*, VI (from the *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, by William Jurgens, Vol. I, p. 221). This text is from the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

<sup>37</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Letter to Florentius Pupianus* (ANF, Vol. V).

cannot possess the garment of Christ who rends and divides the Church of Christ.”

In making such an issue of the empirical unity of the Church, Cyprian was expressing the conviction of the Church Catholic from the beginning. Heresy and schism were closely related because both of them violated the unity of the Church. It is interesting that in all seven epistles of Ignatius the Church was explicitly called “holy” only once, while the unity of the Church in the bishop was one of the overriding preoccupations of all the epistles, so much so that it seems accurate to conclude that “the most important aspect of the Church for the apostolic fathers is its unity” . . . For both Ignatius and Cyprian, moreover, the bishop was the key to authentic unity, and schism was identified as party spirit in opposition to him. Therefore the efforts to superimpose upon the second or third centuries the distinction made by Augustinism and especially by the Reformation between the visible and the invisible Churches have proved quite ineffectual, even in interpreting the thought of Origen, whose dichotomy between the heavenly and the earthly Churches might seem to have tended in that direction; but on earth there is only one Church, and it was finally inseparable from the sacramental, hierarchical institution.<sup>38</sup>

J.N.D. Kelly discusses other texts like these in the early Church and notes that,

Looked at from the outside, primitive Christianity has the appearance of a vast diffusion of local congregations, each leading its separate life with its own constitutional structure and officers, and each called a “church.” In a deeper sense, however, all of these communities are conscious of being parts of one universal Church, which St. Ignatius implies is related to Christ as the body is to its head.<sup>39</sup>

Kelly goes on to list the thoughts of numerous early Fathers on the subject of the Church, concluding that

in all this there is implied a distinctive, if far from consciously formulated, ecclesiology. If the Church is one, it is so in virtue of the divine life pulsing through it. Called into existence by God, it is no more than a mere man-made agglomerate than was God’s ancient people Israel. It is in fact the body of Christ, forming a spiritual unity with Him as close as is His unity with the Father, so that Christians can be called His ‘members’ [see Ignatius’s *Letter to the Ephesians*, 5, 1, and *Letter to the Trallians*, 11, 2]. As the incarnation is the union of seen with unseen, flesh with spirit, so Ignatius teaches [cf. *Ephesians*, 10, 3; *Magnesians*, 13; *Smyrneans*, 12, 2] that the Church is at once flesh and Spirit, its

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<sup>38</sup> Pelikan, vol. I, pp. 159-160.

<sup>39</sup> Kelly, pp. 189-190, citing the *Letter to the Ephesians*, 17, 1.

unity being the union of both. And it is a holy community within which the divine Spirit lives and operates.” . . .

What these early fathers were envisaging was almost always the empirical, visible society; they had little or no inkling of the distinction which was later to become important between a visible and an invisible Church . . . [Hermas was] much more concerned with the visible Christian society, with its ministers and its more or less perfect members. For a fuller development of the theory of the invisible, pre-existent Church we have to look to Valentinian Gnosticism. In its cosmology, as expounded by Irenaeus [cf. *Against All Heresies*, I, 2, 2; I, 11, 1; I, 12, 3], the Church was a mysterious aeon, a member of the primitive ogdoad from which all things were derived.

Irenaeus gathers together the main second-century ideas about the Church and, in conscious reaction against Gnosticism, imposes a sharper outline on them. Like his predecessors, he regards the Church as the new Israel; it is Christ's glorious body, the mother of Christians. It is endowed with mysterious powers which it exercises without charge, and bestows graces which cannot be counted. And it is the unique sphere of the Spirit, Who has indeed been especially entrusted to it, so that we can only attain communion with Christ in the Church. 'Where the Church is,' he writes [*Heresies*, III, 24, 1], 'there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and all grace; and the Spirit is the Truth. Those, therefore, who do not participate in the Spirit neither feed at their mother's breasts nor drink the bright fountain issuing from Christ's body.' His most characteristic thought, however, is that the Church is the sole repository of the truth [cf. 1 Tim 3.15], and is such because it has a monopoly of the apostolic writings, the apostolic oral tradition and the apostolic faith. Because of its proclamation of this one faith inherited from the apostles the Church, scattered as it is through the entire world, can claim to be one [*Heresies*, I, 10, 2]. Hence his emphasis on the 'canon of truth,' i.e. the framework of doctrine which is handed down in the Church and which, in contrast to the variegated teachings of the Gnostics ['of the Protestants?'], is identical and self-consistent everywhere.<sup>40</sup>

These views continued to hold among Catholic Fathers in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. For example,

Tertullian's conception [of the Church], at any rate during his Catholic phase, hardly differed from that of Irenaeus. 'We are a body', he writes [*Apology*, 39, 1] 'knit together by the bond of piety, by unity of discipline and by the contract of hope.' There can only be one Church spread throughout the world, just as there is one God, one Christ, one hope, one baptism; and this is the Bride of Christ

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 190-193.

mentioned in Solomon's *Song*, the mother of Christians (*domina mater ecclesia*). In this latter thought can be discerned more than the germ of the later axiom that only he who has the Church for his mother can have God as his Father. Like Irenaeus again, as we have already seen, Tertullian insists that the Church is the unique home of the Spirit, the sole repository of the apostolic succession of bishops. . . It is only when Tertullian leaves the Catholic Church and becomes a Montanist schismatic that his understanding of the Church shifts to more of a "charismatic society . . . [with its] essential nature as Spirit" . . . Similarities to this spiritualized view also found sympathy in Clement of Alexandria, though Kelly states that "platonizing influences were clearly at work in [his] distinction between the visible but imperfect Church and the perfect spiritual one"<sup>41</sup>

### ***The Development of the Creed***

Due to the rise of Arianism in the fourth century, the Church took defensive measures by codifying what She had always believed. The eminent Protestant patristic scholar T.F. Torrance:

. . . radically dualist modes of thought taken over from Hellenism in the second and third centuries, not least by Alexandrians, laid the basis for serious problems. Thus both Clement and Origen operated with a radical Platonic disjunction between the sensible world and in intelligible world, which led them to draw a damaging distinction between a physical or sensible Gospel and a spiritual or eternal Gospel, and to claim that the former will pass away, for it is only a shadowy representation of the latter. It was thus inevitable that a corresponding distinction would be drawn between the visible earthly Church regarded as a passing similitude of the real thing, and the invisible Church of enduring spiritual reality, which Origen spoke of as the mystical 'bride of Christ.'

It was when this dualist way of thinking was found to affect the very core of Christian belief in the incarnation, by driving a sharp line of demarcation between the Son and God the Father, that the Nicene Fathers inserted the *homoousion* into the midst of the Creed, which not only secured the supreme truth of the Deity of Christ but had the effect of undermining dualist concepts and establishing a realist and unitary basis for the interpretation and proclamation of the gospel of the incarnation of the Son and Word of God in Jesus Christ. Hence for Nicene ecclesiology the focus of attention was on the incorporation of believers into the Body of Christ on the ground of reconciliation with God which He had accomplished in and through His bodily

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p. 200-202.

death and resurrection. That is to say, it was precisely the visible, empirical Church in space and time that was held to be the Body of Christ. It should now be clear, on the other hand, that any failure to grasp the implications of this Nicene theology for a realist and unitary doctrine of the Church, opened the door for the identification of the real Church with a spiritualised timeless and spaceless magnitude, and for the ongoing life and mission of the empirical Church to be regarded as subject to the laws that control human society in this world. In other words, it would result in a state of affairs in which the dualist sub-structure prevailing in Graeco-Roman institutions of society and law would inevitably entangle the Church in a distinction between a juridical Society on the one hand, and a mystical body on the other hand, but that would involve the rejection of the doctrine that through the sanctifying and renewing presence of the Holy Spirit, *the empirical Church is the Body of Christ*. Thus Nicene theology became strengthened in its belief that ‘the reality of the Church is the earthly-historical form of the existence of Jesus Christ, the one holy catholic and apostolic Church’ [quoting Barth]. . .

The crucial problem in the doctrine of the Church that confronted the Nicene theologians in the fourth century may be set out in the following way. Arianism held that the relation between the Son and the Father was merely of an external or moral kind contingent upon the divine will, and not internal to the one being of the Godhead. Correspondingly, it operated with an external relation between the saving work and the Person of Christ, and thus also with an external or moral relation between the Church and Christ. Hence the Church was regarded, not as the Body of Christ, but as a community formed through the voluntary association of like-minded people.<sup>42</sup> Nicene theology, on the

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<sup>42</sup> This ecclesial mindset is easily nurtured by most Protestant ecclesiologies and is certainly characteristic of the vast majority of American evangelicals today (and unfortunately some uninformed and overly “Americanized” Orthodox and Roman Catholics as well). When the understanding of the Church ceases to consciously flow from an orthodox Christology, the result is often an individualistic voluntarism: “just-me-and-Jesus” buffet-style Christianity. Robert Bellah suggests the main source of this mentality in America:

“In seventeenth-century England, a radical philosophical defense of individual rights emerged that owed little to either classical or biblical sources. . . John Locke is the key figure and one enormously influential in America. The essence of the Lockean position is an almost ontological individualism. The individual is prior to society, which comes into existence only through the voluntary contract of individuals trying to maximize their own self-interest. It is from this position that we have derived the tradition of utilitarian individualism. But because one can only know what is useful to one by consulting one’s desires and sentiments, this is also ultimately the source of the expressive individualist tradition as well.” [Robert N. Bellah, et al, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 144].

Read what John Locke had to say:



other hand, held that the relation between the Son and the Father was internal to the one eternal being of God, and was not an external creaturely or moral relation but one intrinsic to the essential nature of God. Correspondingly, it operated with an internal ontological relation between the Person and work of Christ, and thus with an internal relation between the Church and Christ of a dynamic and ontological kind established through the reconciling and incorporating activity of the incarnate Son and the communion of the Holy Spirit.”

It was early Christian understanding of the incarnation and atonement in their mutual involution in the one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus, that gave rise to the classical doctrine of the Church. Through the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon it, the Church was constituted the unique ‘place’ where access to the Father through the Son was grounded in space and time among the nations of mankind. In one Spirit the reconciling exchange between Christ and sinful men and women was actualized in their existence individually and conjointly, and thus the Church was called out from the midst of mankind into being as the Body of Christ in the world, united to Him and unified in Him. The central point upon which the doctrine of the Church as the Body of Christ hinged was located in the mystery of union and communion with Jesus Christ the incarnate Son of God who was Himself of one being (*homoousios*) with God the Father.

The continuing actualization of the Church takes place through holy baptism, when by the power of the Spirit people are initiated into the union with Christ,

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“Let us now consider what church is. A church, then, I take to be a voluntary society of men, joining themselves together of their own accord in order to the public worshipping of God in such a manner as they judge acceptable to Him, and effectual to the salvation of their souls. . . .Some, perhaps, may object that no such society can be said to be a true church unless it have in it a bishop or presbyter, with ruling authority derived from the very apostles, and continued down to the present times by an uninterrupted succession. To these I answer: In the first place, let them show me the edict by which Christ has imposed that law upon His Church. And let not any man think me impertinent, if in a thing of this consequence I require that the terms of that edict be very express and positive; for the promise He has made us, that ‘wherever two or three are gathered together’ [Matthew 18:20] in His name, He will be in the midst of them, seems to imply the contrary. Whether such an assembly want anything necessary to a true church, pray do you consider. Certain I am that nothing can be there wanting unto the salvation of souls, which is sufficient to our purpose. . . . provided I may have liberty . . . to join myself to that society in which I am persuaded those things are to be found which are necessary to the salvation of my soul.” [A Letter Concerning Toleration, in the *Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 33, (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., (1952) 1991), pp. 4-5].

The connection between Protestant ecclesiology and Lockean thought would make for an interesting study. On the sociological impact of Protestantism see *A House Divided: Protestantism, Schism, and Secularization* by Steve Bruce (London: Routledge, 1990).

sealed in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and are given to share in the communion of the Holy Trinity. We shall consider the significance of the creedal statement 'one baptism for the remission of sins' later, but at this juncture it may be noted that the union in which the Church is implicated is characterized by ontological depth reaching back into God Himself. Through the communion of the Holy Spirit the Church is united to Christ and grounded in the hypostatic union of God and man embodied in Him, and through Christ and in the Spirit it is anchored in the consubstantial union and communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the Holy Trinity.

We are now in a better position to consider the formal confession of belief 'in one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church,' with a view to throwing some of the ideas that have come before us in sharper relief. (I) The Oneness of the Church: The Creed here is speaking of the visible or empirical Church, which has come down in history from the apostles, and places it within the frame of its belief in 'the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, Who spoke by the prophets.' That is to say, the existence of the Church is not the product of human activity, but is to be traced back to the Lord Himself, in the sovereign self-giving God in His Spirit, Who through His Word calls the Church into being and by His own breath makes it alive with the very life of God. In biblical language, the actual Church to which we belong has not been made by human hands but derives from God Himself, for it is the work of the Holy Spirit [Acts 4.10f; 7.48; cf. Matt. 12.42f; Mk. 15.58; Lk. 20.17f; 2 Cor. 5.1; 2 Pet. 2.4ff; Heb. 9.11, 24]. This divine origin, or supernatural formation of the Church, was thrust into the center of Nicene thought with considerable force in the face of heretical claims that the Holy Spirit was a creature, for that had the effect of rejecting the union of the Church with God" [see, for example, Athanasius, *Against the Arians*, 1.34; 2.69].

It follows from this that the Church throughout all its manifestations in space and time is intrinsically and essentially *one*, for it is constituted as Church through the presence of the one Lord and his one Spirit—that was the point of the insistence by Ignatius and Irenaeus that wherever Christ is, and wherever His Spirit is, there only is the Church. We shall return to the oneness of the Church when we consider the 'one baptism for the remission of sins.' The early Church was deeply aware of another aspect of the Church in its embrace of the people of God under the old covenant as well as the new. The very term *ecclesia* used of the Church had already carried that notion of oneness within it from apostolic times, but it was reinforced by the fathers of Constantinople in their belief that it was one and the same Holy Spirit who spoke in the prophets and in the apostles. Cyril of Jerusalem who was present at the Council used to speak of the *ecclesia* in ancient times as the 'second holy Church' called 'the Catholic Church' which owed its increase throughout the world to the fact that the one Church in Judea had been cast off [*Catechism*, 17, 24ff]. Irenaeus, who

had the strongest sense of the oneness of the Church spanning the Old Testament and the New Testament, cited an earlier source to the effect that through one Head in their midst the two peoples scattered to the ends of the earth are assembled into one God [see mainly *Against All Heresies*, 5.18.1]. For Irenaeus there was only one Church stretching from Adam to Christ, but gathered up in Him as its Head. In the run-up to the Council of Constantinople it was especially Epiphanius who gave expression to this all-embracing unity, when he connected the Church in its different forms under the old and new covenants with the one self-revelation of the Holy Trinity, and described it as the Mother of the faithful, but without playing down the unique character of the holy Catholic Church due to the incarnation [*Exp. Fidei*, If, 6, 14, 18f, 25]. The Council of Constantinople itself spoke of the Church at Jerusalem as ‘the Mother of all the Churches’ [Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.*, 5.9; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechism*, 18.26]<sup>43</sup>

St. Cyril of Jerusalem is one of the most important Saints of the early Church. He was consecrated Bishop in 348, eventually playing a critical role in the defeat of Arianism. “The series of twenty-four catechetical lectures, most of which he delivered in the church of the Holy Sepulchre, is one of the most precious treasures of Christian antiquity.”<sup>44</sup> As such, they should have great authority with all Christians. I suspect, however, that most Protestants have never heard of them. Let us turn to what he teaches in these lectures regarding the ninth article of the Nicene Creed:

[The Church] is called Catholic then because it extends over all the world, from one end of

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<sup>43</sup> *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), pp. 275-280. Also see St. Cyril of Jerusalem’s teaching on the Creed with respect to the Church. In light of what has been said I think that this statement made to me by one Protestant, quoted previously in the Introduction, can be shown to be highly tenuous:

“The Creed is itself an aspect of Tradition and, as such, leaves room for a spectrum of interpretations. For you to demand that there is only one possible interpretation of the Creed is certainly counter to the way which that same Tradition has interacted with itself. The whole methodology of the Councils permits a breadth of freedom within certain conceptual parameters. We are not all required to affirm the same interpretation of the Creed, just the same Creed.”

As an Orthodox friend remarked to me,

“if that’s the case, then the creed is pointless—we might as well all be chanting nonsense, as long as we all say the same incoherent syllables at the same time. No, I believe we must agree not only on the words we use but on their *meaning*. In fact, Fr. Hopko said in his Dogmatic Theology class that if it were a choice of using the same words with different meanings or using different words to express the same meaning, we Orthodox must certainly prefer the latter.”

<sup>44</sup> Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol. III, *The Golden Age of Greek Patristic Literature From the Council of Nicaea to the Council of Chalcedon* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1960), p. 363.

the earth to the other; and because it teaches universally and completely one and all the doctrines which ought to come to men's knowledge, concerning things both visible and invisible, heavenly and earthly; and because it brings into subjection to godliness the whole race of mankind, governors and governed, learned and unlearned; and because it universally treats and heals the whole class of sins, which are committed by soul or body, and possesses in itself every form of virtue which is named, both in deeds and words, and in every kind of spiritual gifts. . . .

Concerning this Holy Catholic Church Paul writes to Timothy, "That you may know how you ought to behave thyself in the House of God, which is the Church of the Living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3.15).

But since the word *Ecclesia* is applied to different things (as also it is written of the multitude in the theater of the Ephesians, And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the Assembly), and since one might properly and truly say that there is a Church of evil doers, I mean the meetings of the heretics, the Marcionists and Manichees, and the rest, for this cause the Faith has securely delivered to you now the Article, "And in one Holy Catholic Church;" that you may avoid their wretched meetings, and ever abide with the Holy Church Catholic in which you were regenerated. And if ever you are sojourning in cities, inquire not simply where the Lord's House is (for the other sects of the profane also attempt to call their own dens houses of the Lord), nor merely where the church is, but where is the Catholic Church. For this is the peculiar name of this Holy Church, the mother of us all, which is the spouse of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God (for it is written, As Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it, and all the rest,) and is a figure and copy of Jerusalem which is above, which is free, and the mother of us all; which before was barren, but now has many children.

. . . In this Holy Catholic Church receiving instruction and behaving ourselves virtuously, we shall attain the kingdom of heaven, and inherit eternal life.

We are now in a better position to fully critique Protestant ecclesiology.

### ***The Errors of Denominationalism***

The Orthodox Church, which holds emphatically to the original meaning of the Creed, finds "no Biblical reason either to *divide* the Church into two 'parts' as the Catholics do (visible/invisible), or to believe it exists only in heaven (the invisible 'mystical' body of Christ) as many Evangelical- Fundamentalists do. The Eastern Church has a different view from both the Protestant and the Roman Catholic vision of the Church. Unlike the Reformers, the East did not have to do battle against Roman claims nor was it greatly effected by Augustine's dualistic teachings. These factors allowed the Eastern Church to escape many of the philosophical and theological dilemmas within which the Reformers were born.<sup>45</sup> Eastern Christians believe that

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<sup>45</sup> See also the very insightful critique of Protestantism by the former Lutheran pastor Louis Bouyer in his *The Spirit and Forms of Protestantism*, (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1961).

dividing the Church into visible and invisible parcels actually contradicts the very nature of the Church. The Church is *one, whole organism. The visible is inseparably linked to and a part of the invisible, and vice versa. If the Church is indeed the Body of Christ (not two different bodies, one in heaven and one on earth), then her nature must be an undivided whole. In short, Eastern Christianity holds to a visible yet mystical body of Christ. . . The Church is one organism within one Christ: 'There is one Body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all' (Eph. 4.5-6). This intrinsic wholeness of the Church leads Eastern Christians to refuse to see Christianity as a collective of denominations. The Lord is the shepherd of 'one flock' (John 10.16). Dissensions and factions are a work of the flesh (Gal. 5.19, 20f), not an administrative division of the Church. The Church's internal being can neither be reduced nor altered. The divisions between East and West, the Reformation, the Radical Reformation, or other such reform movements, have neither decreased nor increased the number of 'pieces' making up the Church. Christianity is not the sum total of all denominations."*

This is one of the main reasons why Orthodox consider Protestant ecclesiology to contain elements of both "Nestorianism" and "Docetism." It's not that most Protestants would affirm a non-Chalcedonian Christology, but that their theological reasoning, or methodology, is inconsistent. They do not draw consistent conclusions about ecclesiology from Orthodox Christology. Thus, Vladimir Lossky observes:

"The Church, in its Christological aspect, appears as an organism having two natures, two operations and two wills [as opposed to Monothelitism, a 6th century heresy defeated by St. Maximus the Confessor]. In the history of Christian dogma all the Christological heresies come to life anew and reappear with reference to the Church. Thus, there arises a Nestorian ecclesiology, the error of those who would divide the Church into distinct beings: on the one hand the heavenly and invisible Church, alone true and absolute; on the other, the earthly Church (or rather, 'churches') imperfect and relative, wandering in the shadows, human societies seeking to draw near, so far as is possible for them, to that transcendent perfection. . . . Thus, all that can be asserted or denied about Christ [or the Trinity, for that matter] can equally well be applied to the Church, inasmuch as it is a theandric organism, or, more exactly, a created nature inseparably united to God in the hypostasis of the Son, a being which has—as He has—two natures, two wills, and two operations which are at once inseparable and yet distinct.<sup>46</sup>

In his latest book, Innocent (Clark) Carlton makes the following remarks *apropos* our discussion:

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<sup>46</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, (London: James Clark & Co., 1956), pp. 186-7.

To say that we do not believe *in* the Church because the Church is not God sounds perfectly reasonable. It sounds as though we are safeguarding ourselves from any pagan confusion between Creator and creature. Yet, this obsession with protecting the “honor” of God was precisely the motivation behind both the Arian and Nestorian heresies. Indeed, this is nothing else than the application of Nestorian theology to the doctrine of the Church.

The humanity of Christ had no existence of its own apart its union with Him. There was no Man Jesus prior to the Incarnation. The eternal Son and Word of God the Father is the Man Jesus, and the Man Jesus is none other than the Logos of God. Thus, the Church decreed at the Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431) that one *must* confess the Virgin Mary to be the Mother of God, for the One Who was born of her was God Himself, not simply a man joined to God. Likewise, the Church confesses that it was God Himself Who suffered and died on the cross in the flesh.

According to St. Paul, the Church is nothing less than the Body of Christ, *the fulness of Him that filleth all in all* (Eph. 1:23). He goes on to say, *For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones* (Eph 5:30). Likewise, Christ Himself said, *He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him* (John 6:56).

Nestorius could not conceive of a genuine union of God and man, so he denied that the Son of God could be born of a woman. He eventually agreed to accept the term *Theotokos* (God-bearer), but only if understood metaphorically, not literally. Similarly, those who deny that the Church is a proper object of faith are forced by the logic of their theology to interpret St. Paul's words about the Church metaphorically.

If in Christ there is a true and indissoluble union of God and man, then His body must be worthy of the one and undivided glory due to the Son and Word of God. Therefore, if one denies that the Church is a proper object of belief—because “the Church is not God”—then it must be the case that the Church is not the Body of Christ in any real sense of the term.

We have already seen that for the Church of the first two centuries there was an unbreakable link between the doctrine of the Incarnation and the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharistic. To deny one was to deny the other. This fact has tremendous ecclesiological implications, for the Eucharist is that which most clearly and profoundly manifests the nature of the Church. Thus, the Incarnation, the Eucharist, and the doctrine of the Church are all bound together—or, more precisely, they are three sides of one and the same doctrine: the true union of God and man in Christ.

For the Orthodox Church, therefore, Christology and ecclesiology are inseparable. Christ implies the Church, for the Incarnate Lord cannot be without His Body. This explains why Kung's attempt to shift the emphasis in the Creed from the Church to the Spirit working in the Church, is absolutely unacceptable.

At what time did the Spirit ever act “on His own”? At the Annunciation to the Virgin, the Spirit came upon her and she conceived the Son of God in the flesh. At the Baptism of the Lord, the Spirit alighted upon Him and anointed Him to be the Christ. At Pentecost, the Spirit descended upon the Apostles and made them to be not merely disciples, but the Church, the very Body of Christ. At the Holy Eucharist, the Spirit consecrates the bread and wine to be the Body and Blood of the Lord, through which we have true communion

with Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16).

To say that we believe not in the Church, but in the Spirit, Who works in the Church is the same as saying that we believe not in the historical Jesus, but in the Spirit, Who anointed Him. Indeed, the parallel with the Nestorian controversy is striking: the ninth of St. Cyril of Alexandria's famous twelve anathemas was directed against anyone who says "that the one Lord Jesus Christ was glorified by the Spirit, as if He exercised a power alien to Himself which came to Him through the Spirit. . ."<sup>47</sup>

"In essence, the Church cannot be in dissension with itself. The Church embodies the Truth, and the Truth can never oppose itself with 'many' truths for there is only *one* Truth.. Since the Truth is whole, the Church can not be sliced and diced into competing denominations. A differing doctrinal confession does not create *another* 'church,' it creates another *denomination*.

"As the Church cannot be *administratively divided*, neither can it be *administratively reunited*.<sup>48</sup> One does not 'bring the Church together.' The Church is *already together*. One cannot divide God and His Truth, and then through later efforts restore them to unity. Those who read John 17 ('that they may all be one') as a mandate to 'put the Church together' ignore the unity and union which is *already and inherent characteristic of the Church*."<sup>49</sup>

"The Church's being the body of Christ strongly emphasizes that the Church is Community. In every place but one where the phrase 'the body of Christ' is found in Scripture, it is used in direct connection with the Eucharistic gathering, the gathering where 'the many become one' in the communion of Christ. Paul's reference to the Church as the body of Christ was not just a metaphor. It was based on the spiritual-historical reality that Christ became a Man and now shares our humanity. The purpose of the Incarnation was not just to make it possible for Christ to take on our sin on the Cross, but to unite *our humanity* Himself, to bring us *into a healing bond with one another* (1 Cor. 12.13).<sup>50</sup>

"The body represents the whole self, including will and heart, soul and mind, as well

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<sup>47</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 210-213, emphasis his.

<sup>48</sup> The push for "administrative" or external "unity"—as opposed to a spiritual one grounded in the Orthodox Faith—is exactly how many Orthodox see ecumenical movement. On this see Florovsky's *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, *Ecumenism I: A Doctrinal Approach*, pp. 136-159.

<sup>49</sup> Bajis, p. 122. In a footnote to this paragraph he writes, "This passage does not call for an administrative unity; certainly there were no 'denominational' breeches at the time which would have led Jesus to ascribe this interpretation to His prayer. That the Church is called to mirror the moral and spiritual oneness which exists in God, however, is beyond question. Only in this testimony, can the world look at the Church and know that God has indeed sent His Son (John 17.21)."

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Eph. 1:22-23; 2:14-21; 5:30-32; St. Athanasius *On the Incarnation of the Word of God*.

as the physical parts. For this reason, *membership* in the body is not casual joining of a group of people, but an incorporation into the body of Christ, the visible body of people here on earth who belong to Him. . . . Our union with each other in the Body is not just so we can have a more intimate relationship with *one another*, but so that we can have a more intimate relationship with *Christ, the Head*.”

“The truth is that our genuine communion with other Christians is actually the chief way that the Lord strengthens us, reveals Himself to us, and transforms us into His likeness. We receive the nourishment supplied by the Head through each joint (member) of the body ‘from Whom [Christ] the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love’ (Eph. 4.16). . . . ‘holding fast to the Head [Christ], whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God’ (Col. 2.19). We are called to actually live in such a way that this *reality* of our shared bond in Christ is *manifested*. When it is, we will be *living* witnesses to the truth that God is indeed among us.”<sup>51</sup>

## Summary of the Key Issues

With most Protestants there does indeed seem to be some common ground with the Orthodox in the area of the mystical nature of the Church. Orthodox agree that the Church has an ontological union with Christ, with Christ as her head in addition to a material existence. This is the core truth behind the idea that the Church is the Body of Christ. The incarnation is central to this way of thinking, and I think that many Protestants would agree with this. However, even though Protestants do not formally deny core teachings concerning the Persons of the Trinity, their *understanding* of them is often in err. I earlier referred to this as “inconsistency”. For example, on the dogma of the incarnation, Fr. Haralampos wrote to me in a personal letter:

There cannot be only a “spiritual” reality of the Church. In the Gospel according to St. John, our Lord tells Nicodemus: “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.”

This saying always scandalized me, but now I see that our Lord insisted upon a physical-material component in Baptism to confirm the Incarnation. The birth into the dimension of grace, adoption, sonship, justification, renewal of our nature, and incorporation into the Body of Christ can only be accomplished through the material component of water (the blood of martyrdom is also accepted in equivalence) because the Body of Christ, our Incarnate Lord and His Church is defined by the material: the Water of Baptism, the bread and wine of the Eucharist, the men of the council of ordination.

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<sup>51</sup> Bajis, pp. 126-127.



Did not our Saviour say that only he that ate His Body and drank His Blood would have life? Many of His disciples turned back and did not follow Him because of this hard saying (John 6:60). They understood that He was speaking very materially, of cannibalism, it seemed to them. Again a material boundary.

The Holy Spirit was delivered to the Apostles in the ordination of Pentecost. It is delivered to their successors by the election and by the laying on of the electors' hands. Again the intervention of the material. It cannot be accomplished any other way. Without it, we end with an invisible Church, i.e., no Church, a Church which cannot be defined, just as even the heretics' eucharist is merely symbolic or a human memorial of sentiment or emotion.

The Holy Spirit at Pentecost came upon material men and abode in them. In the Spirit's power, grace was given to the water to give birth to Christians, to form the Body of Christ. The Holy Spirit again descends upon the material bread and wine to form the Body and Blood of Christ, which upon being consumed, incorporates the believers into that Body—identical with that of our Incarnate Lord—and our Saviour brings us to the Father, as He also had ascended to the Father.

St. John declares: "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God; and this is the spirit of Anti-Christ."

If we do not confess that the Body of Christ is bounded with a material boundary, we deny the Incarnation in deed, even if some form of words is kept: witness the Protestants.

Furthermore, Orthodox cannot accept the Protestant belief that material disunity has no effect on ontological unity. Orthodox believe that material disunity causes an ontological disunity (or rather an ontological separation, since Christ is not divided). Thus, the debate over whether the Church can be mystically one, yet visibly divided, is the "central question at hand." One Protestant participant in ecumenical discussions has acknowledged that his belief that this was possible, and indeed true,

"is precisely an example of my bifurcation of material and ontological separation, and my assumption that the one is not necessarily contingent upon one another. . . . I do not believe that the Orthodox Church is the One True church in the sense that she is the only true, visible church of Jesus Christ. Nor do I believe that those who are not members of the Orthodox church are necessarily not members of the Body of Christ. I believe that the church of Jesus Christ has many members in many place, both inside and outside of Orthodoxy. But *not* outside of a Christian tradition."

Later, this same person quoted from Bishop Kallistos Ware's book *The Orthodox Church*

and then followed with a very clear statement about where he stands:

KW: “Nor is this unity merely ideal and invisible; Orthodox theology refuses to separate the ‘invisible’ and the ‘visible Church,’ and therefore it refuses to say that the Church is invisibly one but visibly divided. No: the Church is one, in the sense that here on earth there is a single, visible community which alone can claim to be the one true Church. . . . There can be schisms *from* the Church, but no schisms *within* the Church.”

Protestant: “This last statement is perhaps the most precise affirmation of that which I would deny. I would deny that the Church is both invisibly one and visibly undivided. No: the Church *is* invisibly one and *is* visibly divided. I would deny that there is a single, visible community which alone can claim to be the one true Church. No: *no* single, visible community can make that claim. I would deny that there can be no schisms *within* the Church; there have been, and there might yet be. I would affirm, by contrast, that the various traditions which comprise Christendom are all aspects, “branches” if you will, of the visible Church. They are visibly divided, but invisibly united.”

Though one might appreciate the noble intentions of sincere ecumenical Protestants, including Thomas Oden (cf. his *Life in the Spirit*, pp. 261-264, 303ff re “unity”), when they attempt to make sense out of the myriad of Christian divisions throughout the world, no Orthodox (or Roman Catholic for that matter) can agree with his view. The Orthodox position has been stated. I think I have demonstrated that it is eminently clear from the Scriptures and the Fathers that the Church has never held any other doctrine other than this: “that the Church is ontologically and visibly one, and cannot be divided,” as Bishop KALLISTOS faithfully stated above.

And it must be plainly stated that Protestants and Orthodox do *not* hold the Nicene Creed in common just because a few Protestant churches affirm it, or use the Symbol in their corporate worship. Dan Clendenin, in his article for *Christianity Today* entitled “Why I’m Not Orthodox,” is mistaken when he said that “it is no small thing for us to hold in common all the early, Christian creeds.” We may hold the *words* in common (that is, without the heretical *filioque* clause). But the *meaning* we do *not* hold in common. The main difference (again, apart from the *filioque*) is regarding the Church. For the Orthodox,

the mystery of the Church . . . is accepted by Christians on faith, and for this reason was included in the ninth article of our holy Creed as an object of faith, following directly the confession of our faith in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. That is, since the Church traces its origin and creation to the one Triadic, true God, being united with the Son and having the Holy Spirit as its soul, which effects the salvation of men in and through the Church, with good reason did the holy Fathers of the second Ecumenical Synod, among them Saint Gregory, ‘Spokesman of the Divine’ (*theologos*) . . . ordain that Christians confess

their faith first in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and immediately thereafter in ‘one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church,’ in the sense that it is the very body of Christ, or the mystery of Christ which is perpetuated in history, or rather Christ Himself, Who exists eternally in the bosom of the Father and Who, when the time had fully come, became man and is ever with us and lives and acts and saves and extends into the ages, and to Whom, therefore, the faith of Christians refers, indirectly through the Church.<sup>52</sup>

## The Ecumenical Challenge

So I ask my Protestant readers, What are the sources for believing as you do? On this key issue: which Scriptures and writings of the Fathers do you rally in your defense that the Church can be invisibly one but visibly divided? How do you square the concept of visible division with Chalcedonian Christology? How can you say you uphold the Nicene Creed when your interpretation of its very words are completely contrary to what the Church has always taught? How can you neglect and act contrary to equally authoritative canons from the very same council(s) which you say you uphold (this is especially directed towards Anglicans who say they are the “Church of the First Four Councils”)? How can you say that the Church can authoritatively bequeath the Canon of Holy Scripture and then not trust the Church in other matters of similar authority, even use the very Scriptures She gave you against Her own teachings? With respect to the understanding of heresy and schism: how do you interpret the concept of ‘anathema,’ the canons of the ecumenical councils that deal with heretics and schismatics, etc.? It seems clear to us that the definitions of the councils, and the actions they took with respect to these people, contradict this statement, leaving no doubt about the true meaning of schism and heresy, or its implications for ecclesiology.

It seems to us Orthodox that a sober-minded and honest Protestant is left with only three options:

*Relativism*: assert that the meaning of the Creed can change through history, or is irrelevant for today (a “no creed but Christ” mentality), and thus the position of the early Church is outdated, the Orthodox and Roman Catholics are all wrong, and the Creed should be revised in light of the aftermath of the Great Schism and the

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<sup>52</sup> John Karmiris, “The Ecclesiology of the Three Hierarchs,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Vol. VI, no. 2 (Winter, 1960-61), 184-85. In a footnote at the end of the passage, he states that Meletios Syrigos inserted in the Orthodox Confession of Peter Mogilas the 96th question and answer, which is as follows: ‘Why do we say that we believe in the Church?—Because even if the Church be a creature, composed of men, she has as her Head Christ, the true God, and the Holy Spirit, Which always teaches her and makes her, as the Apostle says, a bride of Christ without spot and without blemish, and a pillar and foundation of truth. And her dogmas and teachings are not human, but divine. For this reason, when we say that we believe in her, we mean that we believe in her divinely delivered words and her divinely inspired doctrines. . . .’

## Protestant Reformation.

But if you say you now understand and believe the Creed in the same way the Church has always understood and believed it, that you have passed from “blissful ignorance” to knowledge of the Church’s ancient teaching, then you have intellectually ceased to be a Protestant in this most important area. For the Church is the “pillar and bulwark of the Truth,” and to find the Church is to find Truth and Life. Can you, with integrity, remain Protestant if you understand what the Church has always taught about Herself? Thus you are led to either

*Roman Catholicism:* it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the many differences between the Roman Catholics and Orthodox. Let it suffice to say that from our point of view, they have deviated greatly from Orthodox Christianity. A thorough reading of both Christian Tradition and Church history will reveal this quite clearly. For a very full treatment of the Orthodox position vis-à-vis the Roman Catholics, see the two encyclicals of the Eastern Patriarchs (1848, and 1895) at my web page devoted to exposing the current attempt by many Orthodox ecumenists to achieve a hasty and false union with Rome. You should also read my compilation “Are Protestantism and Roman Catholicism *Heretical?*”

*Orthodoxy:* Perhaps it is time to go on a “journey” and, if there is a Orthodox parish in your area, experience the riches of the Orthodox Church, the true Ark of salvation.

If you are not ready to do that, read the writings of the early Church Fathers. If, as Frank Schaeffer has said, “you still come away with the impression that [those who called themselves Christians] were a loosely knit band of individualists that each believed what seemed right in their own eyes, and considered the Church to be the sum total of all those who claimed Christ and were ‘sincere,’” then there’s probably not much of a basis for any discussion. This suggestion, of course, presupposes that the writings of the Fathers (or even the Nicene Creed) carry some weight with you.

### **Short Books for Further Reading**

Carlton, Clark, *The Way: What Every Protestant Should Know About the Orthodox Church*. Salisbury, MA: Regina Press, 1997. See especially Ch. 10, “Credo.”

Florovsky, Georges, *Collected Works*. vol. 1, *Bible, Church, Tradition*. Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1972-79. This little gem is under 100 pages and a superb treatment of the Eastern Orthodox perspective on these issues.

Khomiakov, Alexey, *The Church is One*. Seattle, WA: St. Nectarios Press, 1979. This is another very important treatise on the Church, from the preeminent 19th century Russian lay-theologian. For interaction with his essay consult Vladimir Lossky’s *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. Available from most Orthodox bookstores and monasteries.

Rogers, Gregory, *Apostolic Succession*. Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, 1989. 40 pages. Clearly lays out the Biblical and patristic evidence for apostolic succession. Excellent bibliography.

(Troitsky) Ilarion, Archbishop and Holy New Martyr, *Christianity or the Church?*. Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1985. 48 pages. A modern classic about the essential interrelatedness between Christianity and the Church. His main premise: "Without the Church there is no Christianity." Highly recommended. Available from St. John of Kronstadt Press at 615-536-5239 or St. Nektarios Press Bookstore at 206-522-4471.

\_\_\_\_\_, *The Unity of the Church and the World Conference of Christian Communities*. Montreal: Monastery Press, 1975. 72pp. The best overview on the issue of canonical economy, boundaries of the Church, etc. Archbishop Ilarion is incredibly lucid and patristic. Available from same sources as above.

Ware, Bishop KALLISTOS, *The Orthodox Church*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 1994 (1990), Ch. 12 "The Church of God."