

The Quarterly Journal



THE NEWSLETTER PUBLICATION OF PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH

VOL. 38, NO. 4

OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2018

EDITOR: KEITH A. MORSE

Eastern Orthodoxy An Introduction and Overview

by J. Greg Sheryl

On April 9, 2017, to the surprise of many in the evangelical Protestant world — and seemingly out of nowhere — Hank Hanegraaff, host of the well-known radio program, *The Bible Answer Man*, and head of what had been the evangelical Protestant organization, the Christian Research Institute, joined the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Nearly two decades before Hanegraaff's conversion to Eastern Orthodoxy, in 1998, the renowned Lutheran church historian Jaroslav Pelikan had joined the Orthodox Church. Still earlier, in 1990, Frank (Franky) Schaeffer, son of the late Christian philosopher Francis Schaeffer, left evangelicalism for Eastern Orthodoxy. And, further back, in 1987, Peter Gilquist, formerly of Campus Crusade for Christ (now simply "Cru"), along with about 2,000 fellow-seekers, had

joined the Orthodox Church. Conversions such as these raise questions as

to what Eastern Orthodoxy is, what they believe, and what to make of it.



INTRODUCING EASTERN ORTHODOXY

It is commonly asserted that there are three great branches of Christendom in the world: Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. In this article, we will examine what is likely, to most Americans, the least familiar of these three ostensibly Christian branches, "the Eastern Orthodox Church, also known as the Greek Orthodox Church."¹ (We will use the terms "East-
(continues on page 12)

Inside this Issue:

- THE ACHILLES' HEEL OF THE HEBREW ROOTS MOVEMENT PAGE 2
- RUSSIA ESCALATES CAMPAIGN AGAINST JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES .. PAGE 3
- EVALUATING EASTERN ORTHODOXY PAGE 4

Editorials

THE ACHILLES' HEEL OF THE HEBREW ROOTS MOVEMENT

Scripture is clear: Jesus is the "Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises" (Hebrews 8:6). And: "The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it" (Luke 16:16).

The idea of Achilles' heel comes from Greek legend. It has to do with a Greek warrior who, because of his one weakness (his heel), was killed. In our English vernacular it describes a vulnerable point, a weakness, defect, or even a fatal flaw. That defect results in vulnerability, failure, and defeat.

Personal Freedom Outreach, with its numerous articles on the Hebrew Roots Movement (HRM), has pointed out a major foundational Hebrew Roots Achilles' heel. It revolves around a simple two-part question. We want to expand and extend our look at a question that the HRM has apparently not tried to answer.

The first part of the question is, "Which Judaism should we follow?" The second is, "How much of that particular Judaism do we adopt and practice?" There are those who spend time telling us that the New Covenant is not new at all, but just a renewed version of the Old Covenant.

There seems to be a thought or an attitude within the HRM that goes like this: Jesus was a Jew, and the closer I get to Judaism in practice, the more like Jesus I can become. In other words, literal imitation of Jesus in His Jewishness will greatly assist one's sanctification. Yet as J.R. Dummelow states, "in the case of Christ, though I once regarded Him as merely a man and a Jew, yet I look at Him in this way no longer, but rather as my Saviour and Risen Lord" (*A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, pg. 934).

But here again I ask: *Which Judaism?* The problem of thinking that likeness to Jesus based on superficial external likeness is wrong. Christ-likeness is a character issue, an internal heart issue, not a racial one (1 Peter 2:19-21).

At best, all the HRM has to offer is a grab bag of various Judaisms from the first century to modern times. In many cases, the HRM creates an elitism that can divide the body. What it creates is not Christ-likeness at all, but rather levels of Christians.

As well, though Jesus was unquestionably Jewish, there were times in His teaching and practice that He was decidedly very un-Jewish. For example, in Mark 7:1-23, Jesus seems unconcerned about the sacrosanct issue of hand washing and Jewish ritual purity. In another place, He commends David for eating the priests' show bread (Luke 6:3-5), which was a forbidden act according to Leviticus 24:8-9. The antithesis and contrasts

(continues on page 21)

PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH

P.O. Box 26062 • Saint Louis, Missouri 63136-0062 • (314) 921-9800

Visit PFO's Website at: <http://www.pfo.org>

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

G. Richard Fisher Dillsburg, PA Gary E. Gilley Springfield, IL
M. Kurt Goedelman Saint Louis, MO Keith A. Morse Cape Girardeau, MO

BOARD OF REFERENCE:

Dr. Jay E. Adams Enoree, SC Dr. Norman L. Geisler Charlotte, NC
Dr. Ron Rhodes Frisco, TX

© 2018 – PFO. All rights reserved. ISSN: 1083-6853. These articles may not be stored on web pages or Internet sites without permission. *The Quarterly Journal* is the newsletter publication of PFO. Published by Personal Freedom Outreach, P.O. Box 26062, Saint Louis, MO 63136. PFO's *Journal* may also be obtained on CD-ROM or flash drive in Portable Document Format (.PDF) for use with Adobe® Reader® software.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version, ©1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Because of the fluid nature of the Internet, web addresses or links contained in journal articles may have changed and/or may no longer be accessible.

RUSSIA ESCALATES CAMPAIGN AGAINST JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

Russian law enforcement authorities have escalated their campaign against the country's 175,000 Jehovah's Witnesses. Two years ago, President Vladimir Putin "approved legislation outlawing missionary work, stipulating that people share their religious beliefs only at state-registered places of worship," according to *Newsweek* magazine. And since that ruling, followers of the Watchtower Society in Russia have taken the lion's share of misfortune and persecution from the law. In a further move against the organization, last year, in April 2017, Russia's Supreme Court designated the sect as an "extremist organization," which is said to place it on par with such groups as the Islamic State and neo-Nazi movements. The ruling also stated the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses and all 395 of its local legal entities be shut down.

Now it is being reported that Russian authorities have begun a series of home searches, raids, interrogations, arrests, detentions, along with other forms of persecution against the Jehovah's Witnesses in the country.

According to a report by the Watchtower Society, "Russian authorities have stepped up a campaign of terror and arrested and imprisoned more of Jehovah's Witnesses under the guise of fighting extremism. Police forces raided private homes in Birobidzhan, Khabarovsk, Magadan, Orenburg, Naberezhnye Chelny, Perm, Pskov, Saratov, and Tomsk. They arrested 15 more Witness men, bringing the total to 20 Witnesses in pretrial detention. Two others are under house arrest. At least 15 Witnesses, including some in their 70's and 80's, have been required to sign an agreement not to leave the area where they live. As of June 14, 2018, authorities in Russia have brought criminal charges against over 40 Witnesses. If convicted, they face prison terms of up to ten years."

Newsweek also stated, "According to an opinion poll taken last year, 80 percent of Russians supported the ban on Jehovah's Witnesses' activities." The magazine indicated that is the same percentage of Russians who identify themselves as Russian Orthodox, and that leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church have sanctioned the government's decisions and actions.

On an individual level, responses by Jehovah's Witnesses have contained a mixture of both endurance and exodus. "Unsurprisingly, some Jehovah's Witnesses want to get out of Russia. Spokespeople estimate that hun-

dreds have fled the country in recent months. Yet tens of thousands are determined to stay, and they see the Kremlin's repression as a test of their convictions. ... With their prayer halls shuttered, Russia's Jehovah's Witnesses have resorted to the Soviet-era practice of gathering in secret in each other's homes," *Newsweek* reported.

—MKG

SURVEY SHOWS DOCTRINE DOES MATTER

A survey conducted by LifeWay Research showed some surprising results when it comes to church members staying or leaving their respective congregations. Given the state of the Church today, most would assume that doctrine would occupy a lower priority than issues such as music style or even political views. However, the poll shows that church members are, by a wide margin, more concerned about theology than music or politics.

According to Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research, "Mess with the music and people may grumble. Mess with the theology and they're out the door."

The survey indicated that only 5 percent of church members would leave their church over music, 9 percent would leave over political views, and over half — 54 percent — would find a new church if their present church changed its doctrine.

An overwhelming majority — 94 percent — stated that their present church's teachings completely or mostly align with their beliefs.

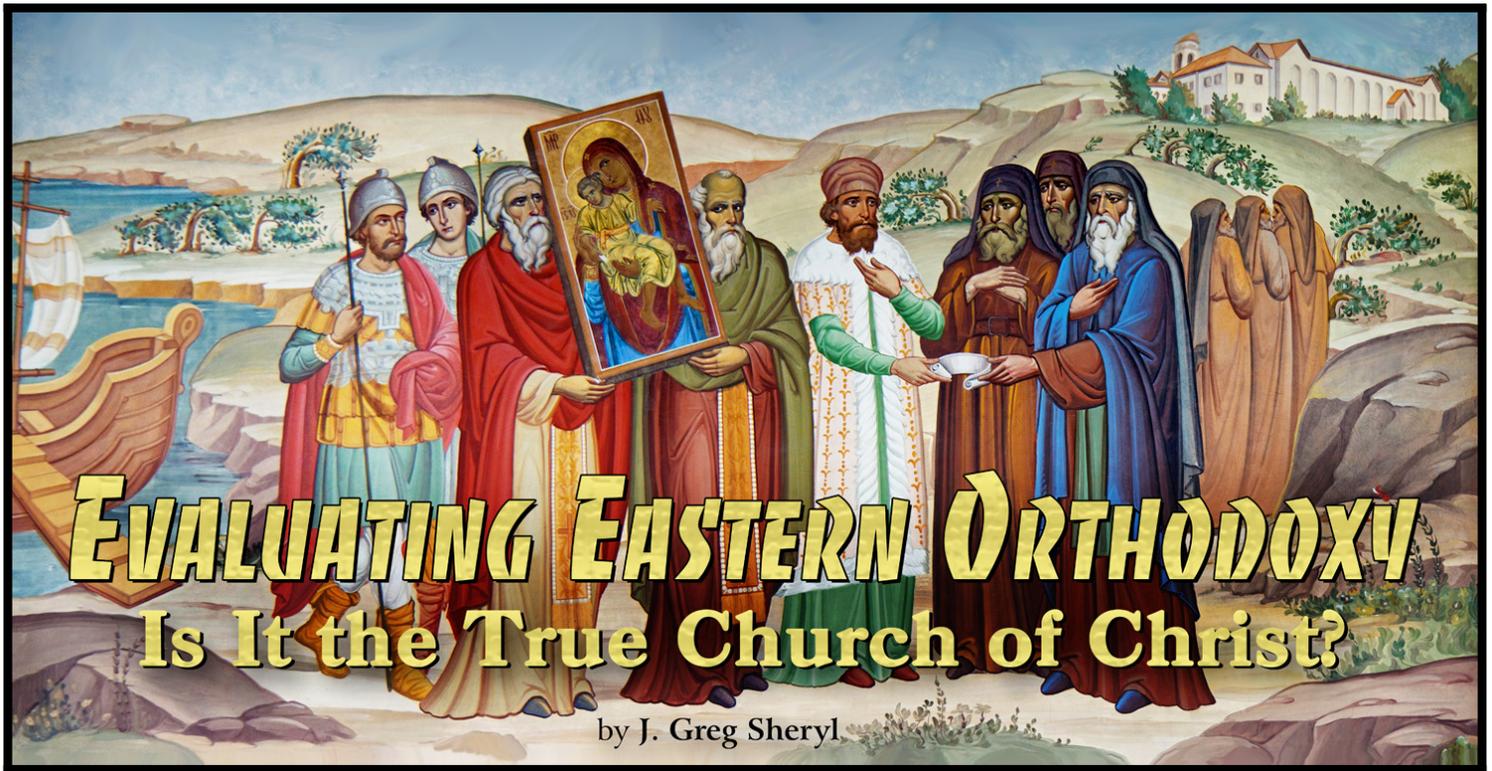
The survey was tabulated from the responses of 1,010 Protestant church members who attend services at least once a month.

—MKG

DUPLANTIS SEEKS DONATIONS FOR NEW JET

If Jesus were physically on earth ministering today, He wouldn't be riding a donkey, claims prosperity gospel preacher Jesse Duplantis. "He'd be on an airplane preaching the Gospel all over the world," Duplantis said. And there is little doubt that Duplantis thinks Jesus

(continues on page 23)



Eastern Orthodoxy is a complex and mystical religion which, like Roman Catholicism, boldly and unapologetically claims to be the one true Church founded by Christ.¹ While it is possible that neither is the one true Church, neither can both be.

As we examine some of the features of Eastern Orthodoxy in this article, see if you believe that they are in line with Orthodoxy's claim to be the one true Church.

Despite their differences, both the Orthodox and Catholic religious systems confuse and distract a person from trusting in Jesus Christ alone for their salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5-6).² By distracting people from Christ alone as the Savior and confusing people about the way of salvation, they make it difficult for members of these churches to be saved. But thankfully, "with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27; cf. Mark 14:36).

This article relies heavily on the perspectives and diligent research of Robert Morey, as presented in his short book, *Is Eastern Orthodoxy Christian?* Morey states that there are saved Orthodox.³ No doubt there also are

saved Catholics. God knows their hearts and He alone knows who among them has or has not trusted Christ alone as their Savior and, as a result, has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, who is living within them.

DIVISIONS WITHIN ORTHODOXY

Before discussing two important topics within Orthodoxy, keep in mind that, as Morey points out, Orthodoxy contains both ethnic distinctions (such as Russian, Greek, Syrian, etc.)⁴ and theological divisions, which he labels "Liberal Orthodoxy," "Conservative Orthodoxy," and "Fundamentalist Orthodoxy."⁵ From Morey's description of Liberal Orthodoxy, it is questionable whether it represents Orthodoxy at all. Part of his description of this category of Orthodoxy reads:

"[Liberal Orthodoxy believes that Orthodoxy] is not 'enslaved' or 'bound' by Scripture, traditions, the 'Fathers,' theology or philosophy. Liberals believe that no Orthodox doctrine or ritual is 'set in stone.' ... They view the Scriptures as a curious mixture of errors, contradictions, myths, and legends of ancient times. They

are at the forefront of the ecumenical movement in Orthodoxy. They are often involved in joint worship/prayer meetings with Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Hindus, and even Muslims."⁶

Morey states that, "The majority of Orthodox are conservative."⁷ Because of this, Morey examines and relies on Orthodox sources written by Orthodox conservatives in his book examining Orthodoxy.⁸ He maintains that:

"Conservative Orthodox theologians have a very rigid view of Eastern Orthodoxy. They are absolutely dogmatic that there are crucial Orthodox rituals and doctrines that cannot be sacrificed on the altar of modernism or ecumenism. Certain beliefs and practices must remain the same throughout the centuries. They cannot be denied without denying the very essence and soul of Orthodoxy."⁹

Concerning the last theological category of Orthodoxy, Fundamentalist Orthodoxy, Morey states:

"I have met a few hardcore Orthodox priests who teach that their particular Orthodox church

is the only true church and, outside of it, there is no salvation. Both Protestants and Roman Catholics are all going to hell."¹⁰

He notes "the fundamentalists represent only a small minority within Orthodoxy"¹¹ and further observes:

"In view of the wide range of beliefs within Orthodoxy today, there is really no such thing as a monolithic Orthodoxy. Too many people assume that Orthodoxy is one unified theology. But this is not true. The meaning of 'Orthodoxy' is in the eye of the beholder; entirely subjective and relative to the belief system of the individual priest, theologian or follower; reflecting the unique cultural and ethnic background of each church."¹²

Additionally, he writes:

"We must take into account the different ethnic communities within Orthodoxy such as Greek, Syrian, Coptic, Russian, etc. For example, there are 'traditions' honored by Russian Orthodoxy that are unknown and even denied by other forms of Orthodoxy. The controversies surrounding the nature of Christ have caused no end of disagreement among those who call themselves 'Orthodox.'"¹³

THE ORTHODOX USE OF ICONS

Icons are two-dimensional works of stylized religious art. One Orthodox source states that an icon is "a painting on wood or other material representing Our Lord, the All Holy Virgin, saints, or events in their lives."¹⁴

The abundant use of icons, in both their corporate and private devotion, is a major distinguishing characteristic of Orthodoxy. For instance, Orthodox apologist Clark Carlton writes that icons "are not a matter of 'decoration' but are an essential element of the Orthodox Faith."¹⁵

Orthodox priest Anthony Coniaris tells us, "The word *icon* comes from the Greek word *Eikon* which means *image*."¹⁶ He further explains:

"The purpose of icons is threefold: 1. to create reverence in worship; 2. to instruct those who are unable to read; 3. to serve as an existential link between the worshipper and God."¹⁷

And he further notes:

"Icons have been called prayers, hymns, sermons in form and color. They are the visual Gospel. In reality, the Eastern Church has two Gospels: the verbal and the visual, to appeal to the whole man. ... One has but to enter an Orthodox Church to see unfolded before him on the walls all the mysteries of the Christian faith. 'If a pagan asks you to show him your faith,' said John of Damascus, 'take him into church and place him before the icons.'"¹⁸

DOES GOD NEED ICONS TO INSTRUCT PEOPLE?

What has been stated above relates, in part, to the second purpose of icons that Coniaris gives above, which is "to instruct those unable to read," although it also includes instructing pagans. Father George Grube references a quotation from St. Gregory of Rome, "Those who can read learn by means of writing. The uneducated learn by looking at holy icons."¹⁹ However, concerning the use of icons to instruct the illiterate, Baptist pastor George Hancock-Stefan, who grew up in heavily Orthodox Romania, states:

"[I]cons were initially supposed to be the gospel for the unlearned, for those who could not read. In view of that necessity, icons should have been removed a long time ago, since very few Orthodox claim illiteracy."²⁰

Concerning using icons to instruct pagans, as suggested above in the quotation by John of Damascus (A.D. 675-749), even after seeing icons, a pagan would still be equally uninstructed, unless someone were to explain to the pagan exactly what he or she was looking at and what it meant. This is particularly so because icons are not painted realistically, but rather, according to careful rules (in-

cluding what various colors signify) conveying specific meanings. Without a knowledge of the rules and symbolic meanings used by iconographers, a pagan would not know what to make of what they were seeing. To illustrate this, here are a few of the "rules" of iconography:

"The eyes of the icon are very large. They have seen Almighty God and have been opened to the 'ultimate reality.' They are aware of the Divine and are now 'Windows into Heaven.'"²¹

"A large forehead signifies wisdom."²²

"Subdued colors are indicators of a spiritual victory."²³

"The * [asterisk] is an indicator of virginity."²⁴

"Overshadowed eyes are indicative of a person observing the world and its activities."²⁵

"Blue is a sign of heaven and contemplation."²⁶

"Scarlet/red means strength, or the blood of martyrs."²⁷

"Deeper red stands for the blood of Christ/imperial concerns."²⁸

Thus we see that this second use of icons, as instructional art, seems, at best, of limited value unless one understands how to decode what they are observing. However, even an illiterate person or a pagan could *hear* the Gospel, if someone preached it to them, which is indeed what Scripture reveals as the God-ordained method for people coming to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ:

"And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? ... So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:14, 17).

Nevertheless, Orthodoxy maintains, in the words of one apologist, "Icons are the *visual equivalents* of the Divine Scriptures. Just as the Bible is not simply a book, so icons are not simply pictures. They are vehicles of revelation, sacraments of God's presence."²⁹

Therefore, the second reason given for icons is invalid because that very purpose given for their use is invalidated by the God-prescribed means for being exposed to the Gospel, that of the preached Word. In fact, God didn't produce artwork to proclaim the revelation He wanted to give man. Instead, He gave His written Word and sent His living Word, Jesus Christ.

PROBLEMS WITH ICONS

However, the real problems with icons in Orthodoxy run much deeper than this. First, in Orthodoxy, the icons are not merely used to teach truths about the Bible to pagans or the illiterate, nor are they simply used to remind observers of heavenly realities. The Orthodox "venerate" icons. They are careful to state that they do not "worship" icons, but "venerate" them. And they insist that there is a difference. Orthodox agree that only God is to be worshipped. However, they believe that it is very appropriate to pay homage and give honor to the people represented by the icons. Thus, one will see Orthodox believers in church bowing before icons and kissing icons and otherwise honoring them.

At a particular period in the history of the Christian Church, called "the Iconoclast controversy," a fierce controversy developed over the Church's use of icons. This controversy erupted in two major conflicts between A.D. 726 and 843.³⁰ The two opposing sides were the iconoclasts (image-breakers) and the iconodules (also known as iconophiles), who advocated the use of icons. Orthodox Bishop Timothy Ware explains:

"The Iconoclast controversy, which lasted some 120 years, falls into two phases. The first period opened in 726, when Leo III began his attack on icons and ended in 780 when the Empress Irene suspended the persecution. ... A new attack on icons, started by Leo V the Armenian in 815, continued until 843 when the icons were again reinstated, this time permanently, by another Empress, Theodora. The final vic-

tory of the Holy Images in 843 is known as 'the Triumph of Orthodoxy', and is commemorated in a special service celebrated on 'Orthodoxy Sunday', the first Sunday in Lent."³¹

Two major objections to the Orthodox veneration of icons, which came to the fore in the Iconoclast controversy, is that it involved actual idolatry or that it at least gave the *appearance* of idolatry to outsiders.

Regarding the use of icons being idolatrous, the iconoclasts argued that one of the Ten Commandments said, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image ... you shall not bow down to them nor serve them" (Exodus 20:4a, 5a). The iconodules responded to this clear directive in part by stating that this was not an absolute prohibition, because God Himself elsewhere actually commanded, for example, that two cherubim be made for the ark in the tabernacle in the wilderness (Exodus 25:18 ff.). It is also argued that God told Moses to make a bronze serpent (Numbers 21:8-9).³² A second defense that the iconodules made regarding the charge of idolatry was that because God had sent Jesus as God in the flesh, it was now permissible to portray Jesus in material form, because God had taken on a body in Christ and that Christ is the image (or *icon*) of God.

Thus, the Orthodox believe that in God assuming flesh this somehow signifies that the prohibition against making graven images is no longer part of the current dispensation in which we are living. They also insist, as indicated above, that they are not actually worshipping the icon, but that the veneration made before the icon passes onto the person depicted in the icon.

Of course, while some idol-worshippers may worship wood, stone, or whatever material their idols are made from, Norman Geisler and Ralph MacKenzie state, "even pagans do not pray to the image but to the spirit behind it."³³

These assumptions and rationale for venerating icons seem unconvincing. It is also interesting that the seventh

and last Ecumenical Council recognized by the Orthodox Church is noteworthy mainly because it condemned iconoclasm and anathematized (cursed) those who were not approving of such veneration.³⁴ Dr. Craig Blaising, a Patristics (Church Fathers) scholar at Southwestern Theological Seminary, observes:

"Orthodox liturgy requires the *veneration* of icons. Scripture gives absolutely no basis for lighting candles or incense for dead saints and clearly forbids the use of images in worship, avoiding even the temptation to idolatry."³⁵

And even the distinction between veneration and worship may be too fine a distinction for some (perhaps *many*) Orthodox worshippers to make in actual practice, as Blaising again notes:

"[T]he supposed distinction [between veneration and worship] may sometimes be too subtle for actual practice. I grant that a well-trained and well-educated clergy and laity may comprehend and maintain the distinction. ... But is this always the case? ... Why then would the Church authorize a practice in Christian worship *that might in any way* cause someone to stumble into idolatry?"³⁶

Moreover, the final triumph of the iconodules (those who favored and venerated icons) is called "the Triumph of Orthodoxy," and is celebrated one Sunday each year. In so doing, the Orthodox identify their faith — Orthodoxy — with the veneration of icons. If the veneration of icons either is or promotes idolatry, then the identifying characteristic of the Orthodox Church, based on their own self-understanding, is idolatry or, as Morey calls it, "iconolatry."³⁷

Nor is this all. In Orthodoxy, icons are regarded as purveyors of God's grace. One book on Church history reports:

"By the sixth century both the imperial government and the Orthodox church were encouraging

the production of icons. ... These were believed to have healing and protective powers. The icon of the Virgin was even credited with saving Constantinople from foreign conquest, although the Muslim Arabs did conquer the eastern provinces of the empire with relative ease."³⁸

Orthodox priest Anthony Coniaris has written:

"The icon is more even than a means of instruction. It is in effect a sacrament. ... An icon participates in the event it depicts and is almost a re-creation of that event existentially for the believer. ... Many icons are regarded as 'wonder-working.' These are considered to be the icons par excellence."³⁹

In a different introductory work on Orthodoxy, written by another Orthodox priest, we read:

"Because the methodology of iconography developed by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in God's Church, and because icons are made with prayer and fasting and in continuity with Church Tradition, they have been shown to be a means of His grace. In fact, traditional iconography has always been understood as a work of cooperation between God and the iconographer, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the intercessions of the one being depicted. For this reason, in the experience of the Church, holy icons are not approached as one-dimensional depictions of the past but as participants in the eternal reality they depict, mystically making present the persons or events set forth. Not infrequently, through God's providence and power, they become agents of answered prayer or miracles."⁴⁰

And in an entry about icons in an Orthodoxy dictionary, it says that following the Iconoclast controversy:

"[I]cons have played an essential part in both public and private worship and are accorded external marks of veneration such as

being bowed to, kissed, incensed, decorated with precious stones or flowers, etc. It is believed that the saints they depict exercise their beneficial powers through them in favor of their supplicants. Icons ... are believed to be effective against illness and to procure both spiritual and temporal blessings being, as they are believed to be, powerful channels of Divine Grace. Many icons had become famous for their miracles, especially two; the one at Edessa, Syria, the other at Constantinople, both called 'acheiropoiotos', that is, not made by human hands. Other icons in all Orthodox countries are believed to have been the instruments of miraculous interventions, especially in effecting cures."⁴¹

While it is not certain that all Orthodox believers subscribe to such ideas as stated above, it should leave no doubt that icons have, indeed, been used as idols and as objects of superstitious and magical regard within Orthodoxy. The New Testament clearly says, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21). In fact, idolaters are listed among those who will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:5).

THEOSIS: THE ORTHODOX UNDERSTANDING OF SALVATION

Unlike both Protestantism and Catholicism, Orthodoxy does not teach that all people are accounted guilty due to Adam's sin. Rather it teaches what people inherited from Adam was a corrupted human nature. Orthodox apologist Clark Carlton observes, "It is important to note ... that what we have inherited from Adam and Eve are the *consequences* of their sin — the enslavement to sin and death — not the *guilt* for their sin."⁴²

Orthodoxy, in common with Catholicism, teaches baptismal regeneration, that a person is born again through the waters of baptism. However, after baptism, one attains salvation through a lifelong process known as *theosis*. Carlton notes:

"For the Orthodox, salvation is summed up by the word *theosis* — or deification.⁴³ The purpose of human life and the content of man's salvation is to become a *partaker of the divine nature* (2 Peter 2:10), that is, to become like God, sharing fully in His abundant, eternal life."⁴⁴

He continues:

"This [Orthodox] understanding of salvation is expressed primarily with metaphors and images concerned with health. Sin is viewed as a *disease*, which leads to spiritual death. Christ, the Great Physician, through His Incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension, heals and restores human nature, enabling us to participate in the divine life of God."⁴⁵

Elsewhere, Carlton writes:

"St. Athanasius' statement that 'God became man that man might become divine' sums up very well the Orthodox view of salvation. Orthodoxy is not so much concerned with how God views man — as guilty or righteous — but with whether or not man is in fact becoming like God."⁴⁶

The Orthodox are careful to say that *theosis*, does *not* mean that man merges with God's essence, such that man becomes another member of the Godhead. Man always remains man. However, in some way, man *does* merge with God. The way the Orthodox skirt the idea that man becomes a part of the Godhead or that man becomes a god in a way similar to the way a Mormon or a New Ager would claim to become "God," is that the Orthodox make a distinction between God's "essence" and His "energies." Both God's essence and His energies are uncreated and eternal. Carlton says that the distinction between God's essence and His energies is a contrast "between God's *being* and His *activity*, that is between His *innermost essence*, which is utterly unknowable and unapproachable, and His *energies*, through which He creates, sustains, and deifies man."⁴⁷ So, ac-

ording to Orthodox theology, man merges with God's uncreated *energies*, but *not* with His uncreated *essence*.⁴⁸

As Ware succinctly states:

"The idea of deification must always be understood in the light of the distinction between God's essence and His energies. Union with God means union with the divine energies, not the divine essence: the Orthodox Church, while speaking of deification and union, rejects all forms of pantheism."⁴⁹

Fourteenth-century Orthodox theologian Gregory Palamas is arguably the figure most responsible for the modern Orthodox understanding of *theosis*. It was he who argued for a distinction between God's essence and His energies. Morey writes, "It is hard for Evangelical Christians to understand the Orthodox doctrine of deification because it is a mystical experience more than a theological construct. It ... transcends human language."⁵⁰

The confusion, even among the Orthodox, about *theosis* is evident in examining some of what is said about it in Orthodox literature. For instance, in the foreword to an Orthodox book on *theosis*, Peter Bouteneff wrote:

"While a seminarian in the late 1980s, I was sitting at lunch with Bishop Seraphim Sigris. ... Like many of my peers, I was rattling on about *theosis*. And he asked, 'Yes, well what is it?' I tried to respond: 'Well, deification.' 'Becoming as God is.' 'Participation in divine nature.' These were rote answers, to which he kept firing back, 'Yes, but what is it?' Not 'What does it mean?' but 'What *is* it?' I could not answer to the satisfaction of either of us and I don't think that this paralysis was unique to me."⁵¹

Evangelical theologian Daniel Clendenin states, "The centrality of *theosis* to Orthodoxy is, like the centrality of icons, quite foreign to Protestant theology."⁵² And he also observes, "Theosis is an area that, while enjoying only modest biblical support, has

a long and certain patristic [Church Fathers] heritage."⁵³

IMAGE OR LIKENESS?

As one might detect, *theosis* can be a murky theological concept, both for the non-Orthodox and for at least some of the Orthodox themselves!

By way of background, when the Bible records that "God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness'" (Genesis 1:26), Orthodoxy says there is a distinction between man being made in the *image* of God (which they teach is true of all men) and man being in the *likeness* of God. According to this belief in Orthodoxy, although all men are made in the *image* of God, *theosis* is the process by which man is transformed into the *likeness* of God. For example, one Orthodox priest has written, "So, when we appear before God, He will ask us, 'I gave you the image, where is the likeness?'"⁵⁴ He also states that:

"Orthodox theology calls the potential for which God created us: Theosis. ... Salvation in its Orthodox understanding ... means not only justification and forgiveness of sins; it means also — and even more so — the renewing and restoration of God's likeness in us, the lifting up of fallen humanity through Christ into the very life of God. Christ forgives us and frees us from sin and death that we may proceed to fulfill our potential, which is to become like God in Christ and to share in His life (Theosis)."⁵⁵

Later, he states:

"Thus, spiritual growth for the Orthodox Christian is developing the gifts (tools) of God resident in the image [of God in man] *in order to attain the 'likeness of God' which is another name for Theosis*."⁵⁶

In response, the most natural reading of Genesis 1:26 would seem to indicate that the words "image" and "likeness" in that verse are used synonymously. Simply reading this verse gives no indication of a difference in meaning. Furthermore, biblically, it appears that God making man

in His image and in His likeness is something wholly accomplished by God's initiative, whereas, according to this Orthodox teaching, God only fully gives His *image* to man. It is up to man to cooperate with God to attain to the *likeness* of God. Thus, this Orthodox understanding reads a meaning into the biblical text (eisegesis), as opposed to legitimately deriving the meaning from it (exegesis).

Even Orthodox priest and theologian Edward Rommen, who accepts this Orthodox teaching, admitted that renowned nineteenth-century Hebrew scholars Johann Keil and Franz Delitzsch did not believe that such a distinction between "image" and "likeness" was correct.⁵⁷

Orthodox professor Bradley Nassif, in commenting on Rommen's acceptance of this strain of Orthodox teaching, sees a difference between God's image and God's likeness. He states:

"[Rommen's] treatment of the significance of the biblical expressions 'in the image of God' and 'in the likeness of God' was largely faithful to the Greek patristic tradition but appeared to be a rather forced reading of the Genesis account."⁵⁸

"YOU ARE GODS"

Bishop Ware has said:

"Basil described the human person as a creature who has received the order to become a god; and Athanasius ... said that God became human that we humans might become god. ... Such, according to the teaching of the Orthodox Church, is the final goal at which every Christian must aim: to become god, to attain *theosis*, 'deification' or 'divinization'. For Orthodoxy our salvation and redemption mean our deification."⁵⁹

Orthodox apologist Clark Carlton states:

"Now we know that man was created in the image of God in order to share in God's life; so there was nothing wrong or sinful in Eve's desire to be like God.

... The problem lies in the fact that Adam and Eve tried to become like God *without* God."⁶⁰

Two primary texts that Orthodoxy believe teach man becoming "god" — or as they say, "becoming a god by grace, not by nature" — are 2 Peter 1:4, which states that believers may be "partakers of the divine nature" and John 10:34, where Jesus, quoting from Psalm 82:6, reminds the Jewish leaders that God said in the Scriptures, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, 'You are gods?'"⁶¹

Space does not permit a lengthy examination of these verses. However, it is important to observe that the Orthodox often only cite about as much of these two texts as are cited above, whereas, looking at the fuller context provides a much different meaning than they claim for these phrases — a support for their doctrine of *theosis*. Secondly, regarding the citation in 2 Peter 1:4, as mentioned above, the Orthodox make a questionable distinction between God's essence and His energies. They assert that a believer can be united with God's *energies*, but not with His *essence*. However, in 2 Peter 1:4, it speaks of believers becoming partakers of the divine nature and, theologically, *nature* is a synonym for *essence* — that eternal being of God which believers are not supposed to be capable of being united with.

Additionally, the verse states that it is through God's "exceedingly great and precious promises" that believers "may be partakers of divine nature." And finally, as PFO director G. Richard Fisher points out, "To partake of something is not to become that something. We partake of food but do not become food."⁶² Morey also makes this point and adds:

"Neither do you become those with whom you are partnering or sharing something in common. Even if we are partners, you do not become me and I do not become you. ... God and man can 'share' certain attributes such as righteousness and holiness without the two becoming one. That is all the word means."⁶³

Concerning Psalm 82:6 (which Jesus quotes in John 10:34), where God says, "I said, 'You are gods and all of you are children of the Most High,'" first, this verse says, "You *are* [not, 'you will become'] gods." Thus, it is not a promise of the recipients *becoming* something in the future, but a declaration of what they currently *are*. Secondly, those addressed in this Psalm are scarcely models of godliness. They are, by contrast, ungodly judges. The reason they are addressed as "gods" is due to their function as judges, a function that they derive from God, the Judge of all (e.g., Hebrews 12:23; Genesis 18:25), not because they are on their way to becoming gods through a process of *theosis*. In fact, the very next verse emphasizes their mortality, which is a characteristic they do not have in common with God! It says, "But you shall die like men and fall like one of the princes" (Psalm 82:7). Mortality is *not* the emphasis in the Orthodox doctrine of *theosis*.

Orthodox do use other passages in support of their doctrine of *theosis*.⁶⁴ For example, Orthodox writers often illustrate *theosis* in the New Testament by citing the account of the transfiguration of Jesus before His disciples (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36). And it is proposed in other ways. Orthodox author Clark Carlton observes:

"The [Church] Fathers often employ the image of heating an iron in a fire as a metaphor for deification. As the iron gets hot it begins to glow and take on the properties of the fire, yet it remains iron. In the same way, man becomes deified by the divine, uncreated grace, taking on the characteristics of God, while remaining human. The iron is not changed into fire, nor is man changed into God, but man participates in the life of God, as the iron participates in the properties of fire."⁶⁵

Morey, however, observes, "The idea of deification is acknowledged by both Orthodox and non-Orthodox scholars as coming from neo-Platonic Greek philosophy."⁶⁶ And he states,

"the 'energies' of God cannot be separated from His 'essence.'"⁶⁷ He summarizes:

"The essence/energies dichotomy utilized by Eastern Orthodoxy to escape the charge of pantheism in its doctrine of deification is meaningless because it is based on the mind/matter dichotomy of classic Greek philosophy. The pre-Christian pagan doctrine of apotheosis [exaltation of a human to divine status] is the true origin of the Orthodox doctrine of deification."⁶⁸

Professor of Orthodox Theology Stanley Harakas, in answering a question about *theosis*, stated:

"We are not called to become 'Gods.' The capital 'G' implies that we are to change from created, finite and limited beings into that kind of being which is uncreated, infinite, and eternal, that is, into divine beings. That cannot be the meaning of 'Theosis.' There is only one God. With a small 'g,' however, the scriptural and patristic meaning becomes clear. Our becoming 'gods' really means 'becoming God-like,' that is, becoming once again what we were created to be originally, 'the image and likeness of God,' that is, becoming fully human."⁶⁹

Despite the strange language used regarding the Orthodox doctrine of *theosis*, Ware states:

"[T]here is nothing esoteric or extraordinary about the methods which we must follow in order to be deified. If someone asks 'How can I become god?' the answer is very simple: go to church, receive the sacraments regularly, pray to God 'in spirit and in truth', read the Gospels, follow the commandments. The last of these items — 'follow the commandments' — must never be forgotten."⁷⁰

Carlton notes, "While the concept of *theosis* is not unknown in the West — it is usually expressed as *sanctification*."⁷¹ Another source states, "Deification [*theosis*] may be understood as

the combination of sanctification and glorification."⁷²

Sanctification is the process in the Christian life of being conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18). Glorification has to do with the completion of the Christian's salvation (1 John 3:2). One source defines glorification as:

"The last stage in the process of salvation, namely, the resurrection of the body at the second coming of Jesus Christ and the entrance into the eternal kingdom of God. In glorification believers attain complete conformity to the image and likeness of the glorified Christ and are freed from both physical and spiritual defect. Glorification ensures that believers will never again experience bodily decay, death or illness, and will never again struggle with sin."⁷³

The synonymous terms *theosis*, deification, and divinization, as well as their descriptions of "becoming gods," used within Orthodoxy ought to be abandoned and replaced. Such terms sound uncomfortably like the serpent's temptation to Eve in the Garden of Eden, regardless of Orthodoxy's *intent* by their use of such terms and descriptions.

Secondly, because these terms and their meanings are confusing and nebulous, both within and outside of Orthodoxy, these terms and descriptions need to be replaced with words whose meanings are clearly understood by both the users and the recipients, to *accurately* convey what is meant by them.

IS ORTHODOXY THE TRUE CHURCH?

There are other churches or cults that also claim to be the one true Church of Christ, such as Seventh-day Adventism, Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Christ, the International (Boston) Church of Christ, and so forth. However, what makes both Catholicism's and Orthodoxy's exclusive claims to be the one true Church of Christ unique, is that each of them

claims a historical lineage that stretches back to the days of the early Christian Church. Catholicism would say that, due to their eventual separation, Orthodoxy broke off from the true Church, whereas Orthodoxy claims that it is Catholicism that has departed from the true Church.

In this article, we have examined two key topics within Orthodoxy: icons and *theosis*. Orthodoxy has, in a sense, defined its identity by the use of icons in personal and corporate worship. Clendenin states, "According to the Second Council of Nicea (787),⁷⁴ icons are of equal benefit and mutually revelatory with the written Gospel."⁷⁵ He also notes:

"On the first Sunday of Lent is commemorated the final victory over the iconoclasts on March 11, 843. Every year during this special celebration of the Triumph of Orthodoxy the *Synodicon* is read as part of the liturgy, proclaiming 'the reaffirmation of true devotion, the security of the worship of icons and the festival that brings us everything that saves.' Conversely, those who reject icons are anathematized [cursed]: 'To those who reject the Councils of the Holy Fathers, and their traditions which are agreeable to divine revelation, and which the Orthodox Catholic Church piously maintains, ANATHEMA! ANATEHMA! ANATHEMA!'"⁷⁶

As Baptist pastor George Hancock-Stefan observes, "On this Sunday, all who are iconoclasts are anathematized with regularity."⁷⁷ Consider, for a moment, a worldwide Church body, that in one of its weekly worship services each year, publicly pronounces a curse on those who disagree with one of its main tenets!

Because, in its steadfast devotion to icons and its regard for the supposed powers of icons, it has been shown that the Orthodox Church does in fact promote idolatry, which is absolutely prohibited by both the Old and New Testaments. Orthodoxy demonstrates that it either is not the true Church founded by Christ or that it has apostatized. Neither one of these options provides reason for it to boast

that it is the one true Church founded by Christ. This does not mean that all Orthodox are idolaters or that all Orthodox are unsaved. What it does mean is that, *as a Church*, it is not the one true Church of Christ.

Nor is this all. In common with Catholicism, the Orthodox teach a false doctrine of baptismal regeneration. And, as Patristics scholar Dr. Craig Blaising pointed out, they also have an unclear Gospel message in which they merge justification with sanctification.⁷⁸ Justification is God's declaration that a believer has right standing with God and sanctification is the process of the believer becoming conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). By merging the two — as Catholicism also does — it can easily result in people who have never actually been saved, trying to *grow* in righteousness. This can only result in a works-righteousness, rather than the righteousness of God, which is a righteousness by faith, apart from works of righteousness, whereby God accounts to us our *faith* as righteousness, even as He did with Abraham. (See Romans 4:1-8.)

The Apostle Paul warned, "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8-9).

In our conversation, Dr. Blaising raised the question, "Does an unclear Gospel equate to a false gospel?"

Eastern Orthodoxy seems to proclaim a false gospel. Apologist Norman Geisler has pointed out that Roman Catholicism is "an institution of salvation."⁷⁹ I believe that this same observation holds true for Orthodoxy. In both Orthodoxy and Catholicism, salvation is mediated to a person by the Church — by the person's relationship to the Church and dispensed to the person by the Church through her sacramental system.

The system, in each case, does not naturally lead a person to place their faith in Christ alone as their Savior. It

may make them feel religious or spiritual, but it leads them to rely on those feelings, on their religious works, and on their church itself for a right standing with God. Thus, it leaves many unsaved, by leading them in some other direction for personal faith than to the Savior Himself, although it certainly acknowledges Jesus and claims to be teaching the truth.⁸⁰

Finally, what is the true Church of Christ? It is *all*, and *only*, those people — Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, or no church affiliation at all — who have trusted in Christ alone as their Savior and who therefore have been born again by the Spirit of God, who lives inside them. These and these alone constitute the true Church of Christ, whatever denominational label they wear, or even if they wear no label at all.

Endnotes:

1. Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Eastern Christianity*. UK: Penguin Books, 2015, pg. 8.
2. Robert A. Morey, *Is Eastern Orthodoxy Christian?* Maitland, Fla.: Xulon Press, 2015, pp. 4-5.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, pg. 21.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-25.
6. *Ibid.*, pg. 22.
7. *Ibid.*, pg. 25.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, pg. 22.
10. *Ibid.*, pg. 23.
11. *Ibid.*, pg. 24.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. Fr. George Grube, *The Orthodox Church A To Z: A Practical Handbook of Beliefs, Liturgy, Sacraments, Customs, Theology, History and Prayers for Orthodox Christians*. Minneapolis: Light and Life Publishing Company, 2012, s.v., "Icon," pg. 239.
15. Clark Carlton, *The Faith: Understanding Orthodox Christianity: An Orthodox Catechism*. Salisbury, Mass.: Regina Orthodox Press, 1997, pg. 113, emphasis added.
16. Anthony M. Coniaris, *Introducing the Orthodox Church: Its Faith and Life*. Minneapolis: Light and Life Publishing Company, 2017, pg. 225, italics in original.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 229, 230.
19. *The Orthodox Church A To Z*, op. cit., pg. 139, quotation rendered in italics in original.
20. Stanley N. Gundry and James Stamooulis, editors, *Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids,

- Mich.: Zondervan, 2004, pg. 211.
21. *The Orthodox Church A To Z*, op. cit., pg. 137.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*, pg. 139.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*
29. *The Faith*, op. cit., pg. 112, emphasis added.
30. *The Orthodox Church*, op. cit., pg. 29.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.
32. However, it should be noted that this serpent later became an idol to the sons of Israel, so that King Hezekiah destroyed it (2 Kings 18:4).
33. Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1995, pg. 328.
34. Norman P. Tanner, S. J., English editor, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Vol. 1. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990, pp. 133-137, 146.
35. Craig Blaising in Robert L. Plummer, General editor, *Journeys of Faith*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2012, pg. 62, italic in original.
36. *Ibid.*, italics in original.
37. *Is Eastern Orthodoxy Christian?*, op. cit., pg. 86.
38. Robert G. Clouse, Richard V. Pierard and Edwin M. Yamauchi, *The Story of the Church*. Chicago: Moody Press, 2002, pg. 120.
39. *Introducing the Orthodox Church*, op. cit., pg. 230.
40. Michael Shanbour, *Know the Faith: A Handbook for Orthodox Christians and Inquirers*. Chesterton, Ind.: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2016, pp. 274-275.
41. *A Dictionary of Greek Orthodoxy*, op. cit., s.v., "Icon," pg. 200.
42. Clark Carlton, *The Truth: What Every Roman Catholic Should Know About the Orthodox Church*. Salisbury, Mass.: Regina Orthodox Press, 1999, pg. 90, italics in original.
43. Another synonym for *theosis* is "divinization." In another work, Carlton explains that these three terms are synonymous. Clark Carlton, *The Life: The Orthodox Doctrine of Salvation*. Salisbury, Mass.: Regina Orthodox Press, 2000, pg. 118.
44. *The Truth*, op. cit., pg. 77, italics in original.
45. *Ibid.*, italic in original.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.
47. *Ibid.*, pg. 87, emphasis added.
48. *Is Eastern Orthodoxy Christian?*, op. cit., pp. 57-58.
49. *The Orthodox Church*, op. cit., pg. 226.
50. *Is Eastern Orthodoxy Christian?*, op. cit., pg. 51.
51. Norman Russell, *Fellow Workers with God: Orthodox Thinking on Theosis*. Crest-

- wood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009, pg. 9, italic in original.
52. Daniel B. Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2005, pg. 157.
53. *Ibid.*
54. Anthony M. Coniaris, *Tools for Theosis: Becoming God-like in Christ*. Minneapolis: Light and Life Publishing Company, 2016, pg. 9.
55. *Ibid.*, pg. 4.
56. *Ibid.*, pg. 9, emphasis added.
57. *Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism*, op. cit., pg. 245, note 25.
58. *Ibid.*, pg. 252, emphasis added.
59. *The Orthodox Church*, op. cit., pg. 225, italic in original.
60. *The Life*, op. cit., pg. 26, italic in original.
61. *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective*, op. cit., pp. 120, 125, 126, 158.
62. E-mail from G. Richard Fisher to author, March 14, 2018. E-mail on file.
63. *Is Eastern Orthodoxy Christian?*, op. cit., pp. 75-76.
64. See *The Orthodox Church*, op. cit., pg. 225.
65. *The Truth*, op. cit., pg. 95, note 31.
66. *Is Eastern Orthodoxy Christian?*, op. cit., pg. 59.
67. *Ibid.*, pg. 62. See his discussion of this matter on pp. 57-69.
68. *Ibid.*, pg. 68.
69. Stanley S. Harakas, *The Orthodox Church: 455 Questions and Answers*. Minneapolis: Light and Life Publishing Company, 1988, pg. 329.
70. *The Orthodox Church*, op. cit., pg. 230.
71. *The Truth*, op. cit., pg. 77, italics in original.
72. Evangelical Alliance (UK), *Evangelicalism and the Orthodox Church*. Waynesboro, Ga.: ACUTE, 2001, s.v., "Theosis," pg. 163.
73. Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999, s.v., "glorification," pg. 55.
74. This is the last Ecumenical Council recognized by the Eastern Orthodox Church. In a sense, it defined the Orthodox Church by its approval of icons.
75. *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective*, op. cit., pg. 80.
76. *Ibid.*, italic and capitalizations in original.
77. *Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism*, op. cit., pg. 210.
78. From a phone conversation with Dr. Craig Blaising on April 18, 2018.
79. Norman L. Geisler, "Why I am not a Roman Catholic." Charlotte, N.C.: Impact, 1996, Cassette tape #GTH405.
80. For this paragraph, I am indebted to Dr. Blaising, who provided the wording used in it.



ern Orthodoxy" and "Orthodoxy" — i.e., with a capital "O" — synonymously for the remainder of the article. Of course, Orthodox believers would maintain that they *are* theologically orthodox!

Eastern Orthodoxy has been called "the best-kept secret in America."² One reason for the general widespread ignorance of Eastern Orthodoxy in America is that it is estimated that it makes up less than one percent of those identifying themselves as Christians in the United States.³ One source states:

"The primary locations of Orthodoxy in the world today are Greece, Russia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. For example, in Greece nearly everyone who professes to be a Christian is Orthodox. In Russia, also, the vast majority of Christians are Orthodox, and the number of Catholics and Protestants is comparatively small."⁴

This same source notes that out of 2.3 billion professing Christians in the world, 1.2 billion (50.9%) are Catholic; 400 million (17.3%) are Protestants;⁵ and 244 million (10.5%) are Eastern Orthodox.⁶

THE ORIGIN OF EASTERN ORTHODOXY

Until the eleventh century A.D., there had been for the most part one large Christian Church, with Eastern and Western branches. However, as one writer describes it:

"One summer afternoon in the year 1054, as a service was about to begin in the Church of the Holy Wisdom at Constantinople, Cardinal Humbert and two other legates of the Pope entered the building and made their way up to the sanctuary. They had not come to pray. They placed a Bull of Excommunication upon the altar and marched out once more. As he passed through the western door, the Cardinal shook the dust from his feet with the

words: 'Let God look and judge.' A deacon ran out after him in great distress and begged him to take back the Bull. Humbert refused; and it was dropped in the street."⁷

This incident, called the Great Schism, which is sometimes cited as the origin of the split between Roman Catholicism and the Eastern Orthodox Church, is a convenient — even if not altogether accurate — marker of the actual split between Roman Catholicism in the West (centered in Rome) and Orthodoxy in the East (centered in Constantinople which is modern-day Istanbul, Turkey). In fact, however, there had been an ever-widening chasm for centuries between the Church in the East and the Church in the West. Neither did this single incident create a *final* rift, although it is commonly cited as being the beginning of the split between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy.⁸ Orthodox bishop Timothy (Kallistos) Ware explains:

"Long before there was an open and formal schism between east and west, the two sides had become *strangers* to one another; and in attempting to understand how and why the communion of Christendom was broken, we must start with this fact of increasing estrangement."⁹

Some of the various factors leading up to the so-called Great Schism will be mentioned shortly, particularly the two primary reasons given for the split between Christianity in the East and the West, which are "the Papal claims and the *Filioque*."¹⁰

In response to Rome's excommunication of those in the East, Constantinople in turn excommunicated Rome.¹¹

WHAT IS EASTERN ORTHODOXY?

It is impossible in one or two articles to adequately cover the various and important aspects of Eastern Orthodoxy. It is arguably the most ancient manifestation of the Christian faith. It is complex and comprises many features.

It's important to understand that the Eastern Orthodox Church is not the same as Eastern Catholic Churches; the latter are part of the Roman Catholic Church.

Protestant convert from Orthodoxy James Stamoolis writes:

"The Eastern Orthodox Church is best described as the communion of churches recognizing the patriarch of Constantinople and in turn recognized by the patriarch as belonging to the 'family' of Eastern Orthodox churches. This mutual recognition is based on adherence to Orthodox faith and practice. ... The Eastern Orthodox Church is, therefore, a communion of churches that accept the same theological, liturgical, and canonical norms [standards of church law]."¹²

Similarly, evangelical theologian Daniel Clendenin writes:

"The so-called Eastern Orthodox Church is actually not one but thirteen 'autocephalous' or independent, self-governing churches. (Some within Orthodoxy say there are 15, but this is a minor, internal debate.) These thirteen churches are united in their understanding of the sacraments, discipline, doctrine, faith, government, and worship, but they administer their internal affairs separately. As independent churches, they are not bound together by any unilateral or monarchical organization, nor do they owe allegiance to a single primacy, as Roman Catholics do to the pope. Rather, each of the thirteen Orthodox churches has its own head, variously referred to as the patriarch, archbishop, or metropolitan."¹³

Although far from being the largest Orthodox bodies, the patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, "enjoy special honor due to their antiquity."¹⁴ Timothy Ware writes, "The heads of these [four] Churches bear the title *Patriarch*."¹⁵ The patriarch of Alexandria is also given the title "pope,"¹⁶ despite his limited jurisdiction. According to

the figures given in Ware's book, the three largest Orthodox Churches, in terms of membership, are: "Russia (100-150 million)," "Romania (23 million)," and "Greece (9 million)."¹⁷ Of the four most honorable Orthodox Churches, the only one having more than 1 million reported members is actually only the sixth largest Orthodox Church, that of "Constantinople (6 million)."¹⁸ As Ware summarizes, "Geographically [the Orthodox Church's] primary area of distribution lies in eastern Europe, Russia, and along the coasts of the eastern Mediterranean."¹⁹ He also notes that:

"[S]teps have been taken to form an autocephalous Orthodox Church in America (numbering about 200,000), but this has not yet been officially recognized by the majority of the other Orthodox Churches."²⁰

THE EAST AND WEST DIVIDE

As mentioned above, there were several factors contributing to the division between the Church in the East and the West. Clendenin enumerates some of these:

"Early on in the life of the Christian church, the Greek-speaking East and the Latin-speaking West began to diverge. In the year 311, Emperor Constantine moved the political capital of his empire from Rome to Constantinople."²¹

Constantinople thus became known as the "New Rome." "Linguistic factors posed other, very practical problems. By the end of the sixth century, neither group could speak the other's language."²² Additionally, following Muhammad's death in A.D. 632, the growth of Islam "isolated the Eastern Christians centered in Constantinople from their counterparts in the West centered in Rome."²³

Theological differences also occurred between East and West, among others, Clendenin notes:

"The East allowed some priests to marry, while the West required [priestly] celibacy ... When celebrating the Eucharist, Catholics mixed the wine with

water, while the Orthodox did not. The West used unleavened bread, the East did not."²⁴

However, the two theological differences that proved decisive in the division between East and West were "the Papal claims and the *Filioque*."²⁵ Regarding the first issue, Ware explains:

"The Greeks assigned to the Pope a primacy of honour, but not the universal supremacy which he regarded as his due. The Pope viewed infallibility as his own prerogative; the Greeks held that in matters of the faith the final decision rested not with the Pope alone, but with a Council representing *all* the bishops of the Church. Here we have two different conceptions of the visible organization of the Church."²⁶

The second cause of disagreement that severed communion between the Church in the East and the West was the *Filioque*, which is Latin, meaning "and the Son," and which refers to a phrase not previously in the Nicene Creed, regarding the source of the Holy Spirit. In the Nicene Creed, produced by an Ecumenical Council (i.e., a council of bishops representing the entire Church), it said that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father." A later insertion, which was not made by an Ecumenical Council, said that the Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son." Here Ware states:

"It is not certain when and where this addition was first made, but it seems to have originated in Spain, as a safeguard against Arianism.²⁷ At any rate the Spanish Church interpolated the *Filioque* at the third Council of Toledo (589), if not before."²⁸

Ware also notes:

"It was not until 850 that the Greeks paid much attention to the *Filioque*, but once they did so, their reaction was sharply critical. The Orthodox objected (and still object) to this addition to the Creed, for two reasons."²⁹

The first reason the Orthodox objected to the *Filioque* was that they believed that any change to the Nicene Creed needed to be made by an Ecumenical Council, a council of bishops representing the entire Church. Secondly, however, they believed that the insertion was heretical. Even those Orthodox who don't consider the addition heretical object to the phrase being inserted without being agreed upon by an Ecumenical Council.³⁰ While, to most Protestants and Catholics, the *Filioque* issue probably appears to be "a tempest in a teapot," the Orthodox are quite insistent that it really *is* an important theological issue; and it was one of the two issues that finally sundered the Church of the East from that in the West. Even though attempts at reconciliation between Rome and Constantinople were attempted after the breach in 1054, the sack of Constantinople by Crusaders in 1204 during the Fourth Crusade finalized the breach.³¹

Ware states that although the Crusaders were on their way to Egypt, they "were persuaded by Alexius, son of Isaac Angelus, the dispossessed Emperor of Byzantium, to turn aside to Constantinople, in order to restore him and his father to the throne. This western intervention in Byzantine politics did not go happily and eventually the Crusaders, disgusted by what they regarded as Greek duplicity, lost patience and sacked the city. ... The longstanding doctrinal disagreements were now reinforced on the Greek side by an intense national hatred, by a feeling of resentment and indignation against western aggression and sacrilege. After 1204 there can be no doubt that Christian East and Christian West were divided into two."³²

EASTERN ORTHODOXY'S SELF-PERCEPTION

Of the three main expressions of Christendom — Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism — both Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy each claim to be exclusively the one true Church founded by Jesus Christ. Obviously, one or both can be mistaken about this;

however, they cannot *both* be the one true Church founded by Jesus Christ. Ware enunciates Orthodoxy's self-perception:

"The word 'Orthodoxy' has the double meaning of 'right belief' and 'right glory' (or 'right worship'). The Orthodox, therefore, make what may seem at first a surprising claim: they regard their Church as the Church which guards and teaches the true belief about God and which glorifies Him with right worship, that is, *as nothing less than the Church of Christ on earth.*"³³

Ware further writes:

"In the west it is usual to think of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism as opposite extremes; but to an Orthodox they appear as two sides of the same coin. Khomiakov calls the Pope 'the first Protestant', [and] 'the father of German rationalism' ... In the eyes of the Russian theologian [Catholicism and Protestantism] went hand in hand; both alike share the same assumptions, for Protestantism was hatched from the egg which Rome had laid. ... Orthodoxy is not just a kind of Roman Catholicism without the Pope, but something quite distinct from any religious system in the west."³⁴

In common with some of what was said above, one contemporary Orthodox tract states:

"One writer has compared Orthodoxy to the faith of Rome and Protestantism in this basic fashion: Orthodoxy has maintained the New Testament tradition, whereas Rome has often added to it and Protestantism subtracted from it. For example, Rome added to the ancient [Nicene] Creed of the Church, while numerous Protestant churches rarely study or recite it. Rome has layers of ecclesiastical authority; much of Protestantism is anti-hierarchical or even 'independent' in polity. Rome introduced indulgences and purgatory; in reaction, Protestantism

shies away from good works and discipline. In these and other matters, the Orthodox Church has steadfastly maintained the Apostolic Faith. She has avoided the excesses both of papal rule and of congregational independence."³⁵

Likewise, one Orthodox apologist has stated, "Orthodoxy is what Roman Catholicism *used* to be."³⁶ So convinced are some Orthodox that their church is the one true Church founded by Christ that some Orthodox have doubts that anyone who is not a member of the Orthodox Church will be saved. Daniel Clendenin remarks:

"But whether a non-Orthodox person can even be saved is an open question in Orthodox ecclesiology. Over coffee one day I asked an Orthodox priest whether I, as a Protestant theologian, might be considered a true Christian. His response: 'I don't know.'³⁷

Similarly, Baptist pastor George Hancock-Stefan, who grew up in Romania when it was under Communist rule, writes:

"During the 1980s I had a conversation with a Ph.D. candidate (who today is in the upper echelon of the Orthodox hierarchy) regarding the salvation of Nicolae Ceausescu, the cruel dictator of Romania. He assured me that Ceausescu was saved because he was baptized as an infant. Ceausescu was a true son of the Orthodox Church. Since my colleague was in this expansive theological mood, I asked him if he thought that I, as an evangelical, was also part of the redeemed. To my dismay he replied that he was not sure! According to this student, since Ceausescu was baptized in the church, with all the appropriate rites, it did not make any difference what he did when he grew up, nor did it matter that he kept saying he was an atheist and that he sought to destroy the church. However, since I was baptized outside the Eastern Orthodox

Church at the age of seventeen, he could not tell me that I was a part of the redeemed people of God."³⁸

CHURCH LIFE

Although there are individuals with additional or supplementary titles, such as protopresbyter or archpriest, Orthodox (as with Catholic) clergy consists of three offices: deacon, priest (or presbyter), and bishop. Unlike Catholicism, in Orthodoxy a person may be married before they become a deacon or a priest; however, they cannot be married after they are ordained. A priest may not remarry if his spouse dies. A bishop cannot be married, although it is possible for a widower to become a bishop.³⁹

The Orthodox Church recognizes basically the same seven sacraments that Catholicism does (although Orthodox refer to them as "mysteries," rather than sacraments). They are: Baptism, Chrismation (corresponding to the Catholic sacrament of Confirmation), the Eucharist, Confession, Holy Orders, Holy Matrimony, and the Anointing of the Sick.⁴⁰ Ware states:

"Only in the seventeenth century ... did this list become fixed and definite. Before that date Orthodox writers vary considerably as to the number of sacraments. ... Even today the number seven has no particular dogmatic significance for Orthodox theology but is used primarily as a convenience in teaching. ... while all seven are true sacraments, they are not all of equal importance, but there is a certain 'hierarchy' among them. The Eucharist, for example, stands at the heart of all Christian life and experience in a way that the Anointing of the Sick does not. Among the seven, Baptism and the Eucharist occupy a special position: to use a phrase ... these two sacraments are 'pre-eminent among the divine mysteries'."⁴¹

Regarding the date for Easter (also called "Pascha"), for most of the Orthodox Church — except for "The Church of Finland and a few parishes

in the western world” which observe the western date for Easter — “Orthodox Easter sometimes coincides with the western date, and is sometimes one or five — occasionally four — weeks later.”⁴² Without giving the details, the reasons for this difference are due to both the use of a different calendar system and also the method of calculation used by the East to arrive at a date for Easter.

Also, in common with Catholicism, the Orthodox pray to “saints” and to Mary, whom the Orthodox call, among other titles, the *Theotokos* (meaning the bearer of God because she gave birth to Jesus).

TRADITION!

The Eastern Orthodox Church is known as “the Church of the Seven Councils,” because it regards as sacred and binding the decrees of the first seven Ecumenical Councils of the Church, which took place from 325 (First Council of Nicea) to 787 (Second Council of Nicea). Although the eighth Ecumenical Council (869-870), occurred prior to the Great Schism of 1054, the Orthodox Church does not recognize it; likely because it “upheld the Roman synod’s condemnation of Photius, patriarch of Constantinople,”⁴³ whom Orthodoxy acclaims as “St. Photius the Great.” By contrast, Catholicism acknowledges 21 Ecumenical Councils; up to now, the most recent ones being Vatican I (1869-1870) and Vatican II (1962-1965).

Regarding the first seven Ecumenical Councils, contemporary Orthodox apologist Clark Carlton states:

“Greek, not Latin, was the language in which Christian dogma was originally formulated. All of the [seven] Ecumenical Councils took place in the East. Their deliberations, as well as their decisions, were in Greek. Even when letters from the pope were circulated in the East, they were read in Greek translation, with the translators occasionally taking liberties with the text. I belabor this point to stress the fact Rome was *never* the center of Christian theological formulation.”⁴⁴

The source of authority in Eastern Orthodoxy is “Tradition,” with a capital “T” (as contrasted with “tradition,” with a lowercase “t”). In a chapter on “Holy Tradition” in *The Orthodox Church*, Bishop Ware explains what Tradition means in Eastern Orthodoxy:

“[T]o an Orthodox Christian, Tradition ... means the books of the Bible; it means the [Nicene] Creed; it means the decrees of the [seven] Ecumenical Councils and the writings of the Fathers; it means the Canons, the Service Books, the Holy Icons⁴⁵ — in fact, the whole system of doctrine, Church government, worship, spirituality and art which Orthodoxy has articulated over the ages. Orthodox Christians of today see themselves as heirs and guardians to a rich inheritance received from the past, and they believe that it is their duty to transmit this inheritance unimpaired to the future.”⁴⁶

Likewise, at the end of the same chapter, Ware summarizes:

“Such are the primary elements which from an outward point of view make up the Tradition of the Orthodox Church — Scripture, Councils, Fathers, Liturgy, Canons, Icons. *These things are not to be separated and contrasted, for it is the same Holy Spirit which speaks through them all, and together they make up a single whole, each part being understood in the light of the rest.*”⁴⁷

Ware believes it is incorrect to differentiate Scripture and Tradition. He says, “Scripture exists *within* Tradition.”⁴⁸ He further explains:

“Orthodox, while reverencing this inheritance from the past, are also well aware that not everything received from the past is of equal value. Among the various elements of Tradition, a unique pre-eminence belongs to the Bible, to the [Nicene] Creed, [and] to the doctrinal definitions of the [seven] Ecumenical Councils: these things the Orthodox accept as something absolute and

unchanging, something which cannot be cancelled or revised. The other parts of Tradition do not have quite the same authority.”⁴⁹

THE BIBLE IN ORTHODOXY

Within this same chapter on “Holy Tradition” where Ware states the things mentioned above, he elaborates on them.⁵⁰ For instance, regarding Scripture, Ware states:

“Orthodox, when they read the Scripture, accept the guidance of the Church. When received into the Orthodox Church, a convert promises, ‘I will accept and understand Holy Scripture in accordance with the interpretation which was and is held by the Holy Orthodox Catholic Church of the East, our Mother.’”⁵¹

To Evangelicals, of course, such a way of interpreting Scripture seems like it imposes a hermeneutical strait-jacket on the reader, because one can only see within a passage of Scripture what the Orthodox Church either directly teaches that it means or, at least, what it allows for the passage to mean. While Scripture must not be interpreted whimsically, this promise made by the convert doesn’t appear to allow any latitude for the Holy Spirit to illuminate Scripture to the believer, should the Orthodox Church’s interpretation be mistaken. In so doing, the Orthodox Church has essentially assumed the office of the Holy Spirit as the illuminator of Scripture. The Scripture must only mean what the Orthodox Church allows it to mean.

Similarly, Dr. Craig Blaising, a Patristics (Church Fathers) scholar, has said:

“The concern that Baptists and other Evangelicals have ... is that the Orthodox extend the locus of divine inspiration and authority beyond the Scripture to the Church itself, specifically to the decisions of the ecumenical councils, but more generally and on a practical level to the entirety of Orthodox tradition. *For all practical purposes, this means that church*

tradition is not correctible by Scripture. Rather Scripture is ruled by Tradition, which defines its message and application."⁵²

Here Blaising asserts that according to Orthodoxy's own principles, their "holy Tradition" rules over the Bible. Jesus rebuked the religious leaders during His earthly ministry for this very thing when He told them, "you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition" (Matthew 15:6, NASB).

Additionally, as Ware states, the New Testament books accepted by the Orthodox Church (and the Roman Catholic Church, for that matter) are the same as the New Testament books accepted by Protestants.⁵³ Concerning the Old Testament, however, Ware notes:

"As its authoritative text for the Old Testament, [Orthodoxy] uses the ancient Greek translation known as the Septuagint. When this differs from the original Hebrew (which happens quite often), Orthodox believe that the changes in the Septuagint were made under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and are to be accepted as part of God's continuing revelation. ... The Hebrew version of the Old Testament contains thirty-nine books. The Septuagint contains in addition ten further books, not present in the Hebrew, which are known in the Orthodox Church as the 'Deutero-Canonical Books'. ... [M]ost Orthodox scholars at the present day, however, following the opinion of Athanasius and Jerome, consider that the Deutero-Canonical Books, although part of the Bible, stand on a lower footing than the rest of the Old Testament."⁵⁴

Concerning the Septuagint, one dictionary explains that it "was the primary Bible of the early church, and most OT quotes in the NT follow its readings."⁵⁵

Christian scholar and apologist Robert Morey has pointed out problems with the Eastern Orthodoxy's preference for the Greek Septuagint over

the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament, including:

"God inspired the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. After all, the Jews spoke Hebrew, not Greek. How the Orthodox could say with a straight face that the Septuagint is more inspired than the Hebrew text is beyond all rational thought."⁵⁶

And:

"The 'Septuagint' adopted by the Greek Orthodox Church is not as reliable as the Hebrew text. It shows many hands at work, some of them ignorant of the finer points of Hebrew and Greek. ... It has some blatant errors. It omits some of the Hebrew Scriptures, such as the later part of Jeremiah. It adds apocryphal books that were never part of the Hebrew Scriptures."⁵⁷

In that the Septuagint excludes "the later part of Jeremiah," it is of interest to note that *The Orthodox Study Bible*, published by Thomas Nelson,⁵⁸ contains all 52 chapters of Jeremiah. Moreover, there are also additional books in at least some manuscripts of the Septuagint that are not in the Hebrew canon of the Old Testament.

The Protestant Old Testament contains the same books as the Jewish canon of Scripture. However, both Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Bibles contain additional books, which Protestants call the Apocrypha and which Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy refer to as deuterocanonical ("second canon") books. Eastern Orthodoxy contains all 10 additional books (plus additions to the Hebrew text of Esther and additional material in Daniel) that are contained in the Septuagint; whereas the Catholic Old Testament only contains seven of the 10, plus the additions to Daniel and Esther. (The Orthodox Old Testament also includes an extra Psalm at the end of the book of Psalms.) Thus, Orthodoxy has the largest biblical canon of these three groups in Christendom. While the Protestant Old Testament contains 39 books, the Catholic version contains

46 books and the Eastern Orthodox version contains 49 books.

Adding to the Word of God, as it seems that both the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches have done, is a serious matter. The Scripture states, "Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you and you be found a liar" (Proverbs 30:5-6).

Some reasons why Protestants reject the Apocrypha/deuterocanonical books include: 1) The Jews never included them in their canon of Scripture. 2) Neither Jesus nor the apostles ever quoted from them, unlike the books in the acknowledged Jewish canon of Scripture. And 3) They contain demonstrable historical and factual errors.⁵⁹

Also, regarding the Bible, *The Orthodox Study Bible* contains this note in its introduction to the book of Revelation:

"While seen as canonical and inspired by God, the Revelation is the only New Testament book not publicly read in the services of the Orthodox Church. This is partly because the book was only gradually accepted as canonical in many parts of Christendom. In addition, in the second and third centuries Revelation was widely twisted and sensationally misinterpreted and the erroneous teachings brought troublesome confusion to Christians — a trend that continues to this day."⁶⁰

One can sympathize with problems that can be created by bad interpretation of the book of Revelation. However, is the solution to *totally omit* this New Testament book — and *only* this New Testament book — from the Church's worship service? If the Orthodox Church is concerned about misinterpretation of the book of Revelation, then should they not study it and teach it instead of completely avoiding it in their worship services? If the book of Revelation is part of the Bible and the Orthodox agree that it is, then it is surely there for good reason and it likely isn't in the Bible

so that it would be quarantined from the people of God in the Church's worship.

ORTHODOX HERMENEUTICS

Much Orthodox literature seems to view the Bible not so much as *being* the very Word of God as merely *containing* the Word of God while rejecting the Scriptures as being inerrant. In their view of Scripture, they seem much like evangelical moderates. They might appreciate the Scriptures and use them, but without regarding them as the inerrant Word of God. To cite but one example of this, Orthodox priest Anthony Coniaris states:

"The Orthodox Church nourishes a great respect for the Bible as God's Word. ... Fr. Theodore Stylianopoulos, Professor of New Testament at Holy Cross School of Theology, asks us to look upon the Bible as a *record of truth* and not *truth itself*. ... Such an approach to the Bible according to Fr. Stylianopoulos leaves room for 'other records of the experience of God, such as the writings of the Church Fathers, the liturgical forms and texts and the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils. It rescues the Church from an exclusive focus on the Bible ... and thus guards Orthodox life from the error of idolatrous veneration of the text of Scripture (bibliolatry).'"⁶¹

Coniaris then comments, "In other words, God kept on talking even after His book had gone to press. This is what Sacred Tradition is all about."⁶²

Additionally, Orthodox priest and professor emeritus Andrew Louth observes, "There is, so far as I can tell, no real consensus over how the Scriptures are to be interpreted in the Orthodox world."⁶³ It is difficult to find a consensus in Orthodoxy about how the Scriptures should be interpreted. Whether they should be interpreted literally, allegorically, mystically, or a combination of these methods. Additionally, there are clearly instances where, in some of their doctrines, the Orthodox have not interpreted the Scriptures according to

their plain and natural meaning and/or where they have taken Scripture out of its context, to give it a meaning that yields the doctrine that they want to teach, rather than them teaching what the Scripture is actually saying.

THE SEVEN ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

Ware mentions that part of the Tradition regarded as authoritative for Orthodoxy is the decisions of the first seven Ecumenical Councils. Fr. Anthony Coniaris, mentioned above, states:

"When the bishops of the Church define a matter of faith in an Ecumenical Council, a requisite for its recognition is the acceptance and consent of the whole Church. Only then can it be considered infallible, or inspired of the Holy Spirit, who resides in the whole Church, consisting of clergy and laity, to guide it to all truth. ... There have been instances where decisions of the bishops meeting in Council have not been accepted because they were later rejected by the Church as a whole."⁶⁴

And Ware states:

"The doctrinal definitions of an Ecumenical Council are infallible. Thus, in the eyes of the Orthodox Church, the statements of faith put out by the seven councils possess, along with the Bible, an abiding and irrevocable authority. The most important of all the Ecumenical statements of faith is the *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*, which is read or sung at every celebration of the Eucharist. ... The other two Creeds used by the west, the *Apostles' Creed* and the *Athanasian Creed*, do not possess the same authority as the Nicene, because they have not been proclaimed by an Ecumenical Council."⁶⁵

Following his statements about the seven Ecumenical Councils, Ware lists other, lesser methods by which Orthodox doctrine may be formulated, following the seventh Ecumenical Council in A.D. 787, such as "definitions by

local councils" and "letters or statements of faith put out by individual bishops."⁶⁶

Ware mentioned the *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*, which he later in the same paragraph refers to simply as "the Nicene [Creed]." One source explains:

"The Nicene Creed recited in churches today resembles the original, but having been revamped at the Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381), the current version is longer and excludes certain original phrases."⁶⁷

Ware also notes, "There are important doctrines not defined by the general councils [the Ecumenical Councils], which every Orthodox is bound to accept as an integral part of his faith."⁶⁸

"THE FATHERS"

Another part of the authoritative Tradition in Eastern Orthodoxy, mentioned above by Ware, is "the Fathers." Concerning this category, Ware states:

"The Orthodox Church has never attempted to define exactly who the Fathers are, still less to classify them in order of importance. But it has a particular reverence for the writers of the fourth century and especially for those whom it terms 'the Three Great Hierarchs': Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus (known in Orthodoxy as Gregory the Theologian), and John Chrysostom. In the eyes of Orthodoxy, the 'Age of the Fathers' did not come to an end in the fifth century, for many later writers are also 'Fathers' — Maximus, John of Damascus, Theodore of Stoudios, Symeon the New Theologian, Gregory Palamas, Mark of Ephesus. Indeed, it is dangerous to look on 'the Fathers' as a closed cycle of writings belonging wholly to the past, for might not our own age produce a new Basil or Athanasius? To say that there can be no more Fathers is to suggest that the Holy Spirit has deserted the Church."⁶⁹

ICONS

One central distinguishing mark of Eastern Orthodoxy is an abundant use of icons. They use icons in both their corporate worship and in private worship in their homes. Icons are two-dimensional stylized images of Jesus, Mary, angels, and various saints. There are rules governing the way icons are painted, including the colors used and so forth. They are said not to be merely religious artwork — although they certainly are that — but they are also intended to teach theology. Icons are a primary distinctive of Orthodoxy. In this article, we will not dwell on their significance at length, although we will in the subsequent article.

Anthony Coniaris states, “The word *icon* comes from the Greek word *Eikon* which means *image*.”⁷⁰ He also says:

“The purpose of icons is three-fold: 1. to create reverence in worship; 2. to instruct those who are unable to read; 3. to serve as an existential link between the worshipper and God.”⁷¹

Coniaris further states:

“Icons have been called prayers, hymns, sermons in form and color. They are the visual Gospel. In reality, the Eastern Church has two Gospels: the verbal and the visual, to appeal to the whole man. ... One has but to enter an Orthodox Church to see unfolded before him on the walls all the mysteries of the Christian faith. ‘If a pagan asks you to show him your faith,’ said John of Damascus, ‘take him into church and place him before the icons.’”⁷²

Regarding what we have said about them thus far, perhaps icons seem “different,” but not so bad. The fact is, however, that the Orthodox view icons as more than merely artistic representations of religious subjects. There was a fierce and lengthy religious dispute, called the Iconoclast (“image-smashers”) controversy, which arose in the Church during the eighth and ninth centuries, partly because it was feared that veneration

given to icons was at least liable to being perceived as involving idolatry, if not in fact involving idolatry. These fears seem to be well founded. The truth is that icons are far more important and problematic in Orthodoxy than the benign description of them that we have presented above.

KEY DOGMAS

Without pretending to be anywhere near exhaustive, some essential teachings of Eastern Orthodoxy include: the Trinity, the Incarnation of Jesus, the Nicene Creed, the use of icons in personal and church worship, and *theosis* (also known as deification or divinization).

Concerning the first two, the Trinity and the Incarnation, Orthodox apologist Clark Carlton, wrote:

“The foundation of the Orthodox Faith — the absolute bedrock of our salvation — is the Trinity and the Incarnation. ... The Trinity and the Incarnation: everything in the [Orthodox] Church revolves around these two doctrines.”⁷³

In a different book, Carlton has stated, “The Orthodox Church only dogmatizes that which is *essential* to man’s salvation. The Church does not dogmatize matters of opinion.”⁷⁴

ORTHODOXY’S SPECIALIZED VOCABULARY

Just as Catholicism and Protestantism have their own specialized vocabularies, we find that Orthodoxy also has a rich ecclesiastical and theological vocabulary. Words such as “archimandrite,” “heirononk,” “protopresbyter,” “*theosis*,” “hesychasm,” “iconoclast,” “iconodule,” “*sobernost*,” and so forth, are all part of this specialized ecclesiastical and theological vocabulary of Orthodoxy.

In addition, many sources on Orthodoxy frequently cite quotations or teachings of various monks, desert fathers, theologians, authors such as Mark the Syrian, Anthony of Egypt, Theophan the Recluse, John of Damascus, Seraphim of Sarov, Symeon (or Simeon) the New Theologian, Gregory Palamas, Alexis Khomiakov, Ignatius Brianchaninov, Vladimir

Lossky, Georges Florovsky, many of whom have Greek or Russian names.

MYSTICISM

Long before Henry and Richard Blackaby wrote *Experiencing God*, Eastern Orthodoxy has always emphasized experiencing God — and in some ways that the Blackabys probably never conceived!

For instance, Ware writes:

“All true Orthodox theology is mystical; just as mysticism divorced from theology becomes subjective and heretical, so theology, when it is not mystical, degenerates into an arid scholasticism, ‘academic’ in the bad sense of the word. Theology, mysticism, spirituality, moral rules, worship, art: these things must not be kept in separate compartments.”⁷⁵

THE JESUS PRAYER

The Jesus Prayer (also called “prayer of the heart”)⁷⁶ should not be confused with what we commonly call, “The Lord’s Prayer.” Illustrating the importance of the Jesus Prayer in Orthodoxy, one source states:

“This prayer has been called the ‘heart of Orthodoxy’. Byzantine and Russian monks associate the Jesus Prayer with use of a prayer rope similar to a Western rosary ... which helps to count the invocations and the bows that may accompany them.”⁷⁷

The usual form of the Jesus Prayer is, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me”⁷⁸ (and some add, “a sinner”). It is probably based on the cry of blind Bartimaeus to Jesus, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:47) and/or on the cry of the tax collector to God, “God, be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13).

Ware explains:

“There are basically two ways in which the Jesus Prayer is said: either it is recited on its own, in conditions of outward quiet, as part of our appointed prayer time; or else it is used in a free way, in unoccupied moments as

we go about our daily tasks (when performing simple manual labor, walking from place to place, and so on)."⁷⁹

While no fault can be found with the words or the prayer itself, in some uses of the prayer within Eastern Orthodoxy, the prayer is easily liable to being the "vain repetitions" that the Lord warned against in Matthew 6:7. Additionally, the Jesus Prayer can be used in a mantra-like manner, with the intended outcome being a mystical experience. Ware states that "because the words are few and simple, and because the same words are repeated over and over again — because, moreover, the mind of the one who prays is to be stripped of images and thoughts — it is a prayer that leads us through words into silence, initiating us into *hesychia*⁸⁰ or inner stillness of the heart."⁸¹

Ware reveals that two developments of the Jesus Prayer arose among certain Orthodox authors in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries:

"1. The recitation of the Jesus Prayer is seen as leading to a vision of divine light, which is regarded as identical with the light that shone from Christ at his transfiguration upon Mount Tabor."⁸²

"2. A psychosomatic technique is recommended when reciting the prayer, which may in fact be more ancient than the 14th century ... The technique involves three elements: (a) a specific bodily posture (sitting on a low stool, with head and shoulders bowed); (b) regulation of the rhythm of the breathing; (c) inner concentration upon the place of the heart."⁸³

Ware then states:

"There are parallels to all this in Yoga and among the Sufis.⁸⁴ But this bodily method is no more than an optional accessory and does not constitute the essence of the Jesus Prayer."⁸⁵

Concerning the practice of hesychasm, Protestant theologian Millard Erickson writes:

"A Christian monastic movement that developed a series of spiritual exercises intended to produce a mystical encounter. The adherents of hesychasm assumed a contemplative posture that included directing one's gaze toward the region of the navel. Accordingly, they were dubbed 'navel gazers.'"⁸⁶

In his discussion of hesychasm, Robert Morey states:

"Having studied, lectured, and written on Hinduism, Buddhism, and the New Age Movement for many years, I can state without hesitation that what the [Orthodox] monks on Mt. Athos claim to experience is the same thing as what the Hindu holy men, Buddhist monks, and New Agers claim to experience."⁸⁷

THE PHILOKALIA

The word *philokalia* means "love of the beautiful"⁸⁸ and the *Philokalia* is a multi-volume collection of spiritual writings, which has been called "The Bible of Orthodox Spirituality."⁸⁹ One source explains:

"It is an anthology of spiritual writings by some thirty Church Fathers, ranging from the fourth to the fifteenth century, assembled by two modern saints of the Orthodox Church: St. Macarios Notaras (1731-1805), Archbishop of Corinth, and St. Nicodemus the Agiorite (1749-1809)."⁹⁰

Ware refers to it as "a vast anthology of ascetic and mystical texts."⁹¹ He also states that it "was intended by its editors for laypeople living in the world as well as for monks, [and it] is devoted especially to the theory and practice of inner prayer, and in particular the Jesus Prayer."⁹²

In a famous piece of Orthodox spirituality, called *The Way of a Pilgrim*, an Orthodox pilgrim in mid-nineteenth-century Russia, extols the volume thus:

"The book is marked by a lofty wisdom and is so profitable to use that it is considered the

foremost and best manual of the contemplative spiritual life. As the revered Nicephorus said, 'It leads one to salvation without labor and sweat.' 'Is it then more sublime and holy than the Bible?' I [i.e., the pilgrim] asked. 'No, it is not that. But it contains clear explanations of what the Bible holds in secret and which cannot be easily grasped by our shortsighted understanding.'"⁹³

In practice, this advice demeans the ability of the Holy Spirit to use the Bible to speak directly to the believer, by imposing the intermediary of the *Philokalia* as a necessary adjunct to Bible understanding.

Regarding the *Philokalia's* purpose, Orthodox priest Anthony Coniaris relates that one of its editors, St. Nicodemus, regarded its purpose saying, "This ember of grace [we] received at baptism must be fanned into a new flame in our hearts. The *Philokalia* outlines exactly how this ember of grace can be fanned into a flame of faith."⁹⁴

The English translation of the *Philokalia* is five volumes. Coniaris further states:

"A treasure house of spiritual wisdom, the *Philokalia* has become one of the most widely read books in the Orthodox as well as the non-Orthodox world. ... Some feel that the influence of the *Philokalia* among the Orthodox is second only to the Bible."⁹⁵

MT. ATHOS

Monasticism seems to be revered in Orthodoxy and monks are highly regarded as being saintly and "a cut above" other men. Mount Athos (not mentioned in the Bible) is the monastic heart of Orthodoxy. One source notes:

"Mt. Athos is the monastic republic on the Chalkidiki Peninsula in Greece. It is in many respects the spiritual heart of the Orthodox world."⁹⁶

Ware elaborates:

"Since the tenth century the chief centre of Orthodox monasticism

has been Athos, a rocky peninsula in North Greece jutting out into the Aegean and culminating at its tip in a peak 6,670 feet high. Known as 'the Holy Mountain', Athos contains twenty 'ruling' monasteries and a large number of smaller houses, as well as hermits' cells; the whole peninsula is given up entirely to monastic settlements."⁹⁷

Orthodox apologist Clark Carlton states:

"Mt. Athos is best known to the secular world because women are not permitted anywhere on the mountain. What many people do not realize, however, is that the superior of the Holy Mountain is a woman. According to ancient legend, Mt. Athos was given to the All-holy Theotokos [Mary] by her Son to be her 'garden.' This is why Athos is commonly referred to as the 'Garden of Panagia' (the All-holy One [Mary])."⁹⁸

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have covered much ground. However, in some ways, we have only scratched the surface of a religion that is simultaneously very complex and also very mystical. This article has mainly been an introduction to Orthodoxy and has offered little by way of evaluation. By contrast, in the companion article, we will cover fewer topics, but will delve into more detail on them and we will offer an evaluation of Orthodoxy from a biblical perspective.

Endnotes:

1. Fr. Mateja Matejic, *Orthodoxy: Courage to Be Different, Strength to Remain the Same*. Jordanville, N.Y.: Holy Trinity Monastery, 2000, pg. 10; cf. pg. 39.
2. Father Marc Dunaway, *What Is the Orthodox Church? A Brief Overview of Orthodoxy*. Chesterton, Ind.: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2011, pg. 3.
3. *Ibid.*, pg. 4. Dunaway gives a figure of 0.7% of American Christians who identified themselves as Eastern Orthodox.
4. *Ibid.*, pg. 5.
5. For some reason, Dunaway lists an additional 78 million (3.7%) of professing Christians in the world as Anglicans, thereby making a distinction between

- Anglicans and other Protestant denominations, even though Anglicans are Protestants. Additionally, the author lists a non-specific category of "Other Christians" in the world at 399 million (17.2%) — almost the same number and percentage as he lists for non-Anglican Protestant Christians. It isn't clear exactly who comprises this vast number of otherwise unidentified Christians.
6. *Ibid.* Other sources give a lower number of Eastern Orthodox worldwide. However, there are probably between 210-250 million Orthodox worldwide.
 7. Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Eastern Christianity*. United Kingdom: Penguin Books, 2015, pg. 41.
 8. See *ibid.*, pp. 41-58.
 9. *Ibid.*, pg. 42, italic in original.
 10. *Ibid.*, italic in original. The *Filioque* is the doctrinal insertion in the Nicene Creed which asserts that Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son as well as from the Father, which is not admitted by the Orthodox Church. This subject will be covered in detail later in the article.
 11. See Stanley N. Gundry and James Stamoolis, editors, *Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004, pg. 16.
 12. *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 15.
 13. Daniel B. Clendenin, "Why I'm Not Orthodox," *Christianity Today*, January 6, 1997, pg. 34. This is a helpful introduction to Eastern Orthodoxy, written by an evangelical theologian who, for a time, taught in Russia (which has a large Orthodox population).
 14. *Ibid.*
 15. *The Orthodox Church*, op. cit., pg. 6, italic in original.
 16. *Ibid.*, pg. 129. Here Ware notes that the patriarch of Alexandria also has other exalted titles, such as, "Shepherd of Shepherds," "Thirteenth Apostle," and "Judge of the Universe."
 17. *Ibid.*, pg. 6.
 18. *Ibid.*
 19. *Ibid.*, pg. 5.
 20. *Ibid.*, pg. 7.
 21. "Why I'm Not Orthodox," op. cit., pg. 34.
 22. *Ibid.*
 23. *Ibid.*, pg. 35.
 24. *Ibid.*
 25. *The Orthodox Church*, op. cit., pg. 42, italic in original.
 26. *Ibid.*, pg. 47, italic in original.
 27. Concerning the heresy of Arianism (named after Arius, the Alexandrian presbyter who taught it): "The central characteristic of Arian thought was that because God is one, Jesus could not have also been truly God. ... Arius and his followers proposed that Jesus was the highest created being of God. So although Christ was fully human, he was not fully God. Arius's teaching was condemned as

- heretical at the First Ecumenical Council (Nicaea) in A.D. 325" (Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999, s.v., "Arianism, Arius," pg. 15).
28. *The Orthodox Church*, op. cit., pg. 48, italic in original.
 29. *Ibid.*, pg. 49, italic in original.
 30. *Ibid.*
 31. *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.
 32. *Ibid.*, pg. 58.
 33. *Ibid.*, pg. 8, italics in original.
 34. *Ibid.*, pg. 2.
 35. "What on Earth Is the Orthodox Church?" Chesterton, Ind.: Conciliar Press, n.d.
 36. Clark Carlton, *The Truth: What Every Roman Catholic Should Know About the Orthodox Church*. Salisbury, Mass.: Regina Orthodox Press, 1999, pg. 189, italic in original.
 37. "Why I'm Not Orthodox," op. cit., pg. 36.
 38. *Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism*, op. cit., pg. 213.
 39. *The Orthodox Church*, op. cit., pg. 284.
 40. *Ibid.*, pg. 268.
 41. *Ibid.*, pp. 268, 269.
 42. *Ibid.*, pg. 295.
 43. Richard P. McBrien, General editor, *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1995, pg. 453, from the table of "Ecumenical Councils" by Hans Kung.
 44. *The Truth*, op. cit., pg. 39, italic in original. Carlton qualifies this last statement by stating that although some in the West may have had a part in formulating doctrine, "it was never a central role" (*ibid.*, pg. 40).
 45. Icons will be discussed briefly later in the article.
 46. *The Orthodox Church*, op. cit., pg. 190.
 47. *Ibid.*, pg. 200, emphasis added.
 48. *Ibid.*, pg. 191, italic in original.
 49. *Ibid.*
 50. *Ibid.*, pp. 190-201.
 51. *Ibid.*, pg. 194.
 52. Craig Blaising in Robert L. Plummer, General editor, *Journeys of Faith*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2012, pg. 57, emphasis added.
 53. *The Orthodox Church*, op. cit., pg. 194.
 54. *Ibid.*
 55. Tremper Longman III and Mark L. Strauss, *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Biblical Studies*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2018, s.v., "Septuagint," pg. 175.
 56. Robert Morey, *Is Eastern Orthodoxy Christian?* Maitland, Fla.: Xulon Press, 2015, pg. 40.
 57. *Ibid.*, pg. 39.
 58. St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology, *The Orthodox Study Bible*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008.
 59. See further, J. Greg Sheryl, "Is the

Bible Too Thin? Weighing the Evidence for the Apocrypha," *The Quarterly Journal*, January-March 2015, pp. 1, 10-20.

60. *The Orthodox Study Bible*, op. cit., pg. 1711.

61. Anthony M. Coniaris, *Introducing the Orthodox Church: Its Faith and Life*. Minneapolis: Light and Life Publishing Company, 2017, pp. 205-206, italics in original. Coniaris cites this quotation as coming from Theodore Stylianopoulos, *Bread for Life*. Brookline, Mass.: Dept. of Religious Education. Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, n.d., no page number.

62. *Ibid.*, pg. 206.

63. *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology*, op. cit., pg. 10.

64. *Introducing the Orthodox Church*, op. cit., pg. 8.

65. *The Orthodox Church*, op. cit., pg. 196, italics in original; cf. pg. 199.

66. *Ibid.*, pg. 196.

67. *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*, op. cit., s.v., "Nicene Creed," pp. 83-84.

68. *The Orthodox Church*, op. cit., pg. 96.

69. *Ibid.*, pg. 198.

70. *Introducing the Orthodox Church*, op. cit., pg. 225, italics in original.

71. *Ibid.*

72. *Ibid.*, pp. 229, 230.

73. Clark Carlton, *The Faith: Understanding Orthodox Christianity*. Salisbury, Mass.: Re-

gina Orthodox Press, 1997, pg. 47.

74. *The Truth*, op. cit., pg. 164, italic in original.

75. *The Orthodox Church*, op. cit., pg. 200.

76. *Ibid.*, pg. 62.

77. Tomas Spidlik in Ken Parry, David J. Melling and Dimitri Brady, editors, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Eastern Christianity*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2001, s.v., "spiritual theology," pg. 459.

78. Timothy Ware in John Anthony McGuckin, editor, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Orthodox Christianity*. West Sussex, United Kingdom: Wiley Blackwell, 2014, s.v., "Jesus Prayer," pg. 284. Although the author's name in this encyclopedia appears as Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia, it is Ware using a form of his adopted Greek name, "Kallistos," and his ecclesiastical title, Metropolitan of Diokleia.

79. *Ibid.*

80. One source explains that the Greek term *hesychia* means silence, quiet, leisure. See *The Blackwell Dictionary of Eastern Christianity*, op. cit., s.v., "hesychasm," pg. 230.

81. *The Concise Encyclopedia of Orthodox Christianity*, op. cit., pg. 285, italic in original.

82. *Ibid.* Although the Mount of Transfiguration isn't named in Scripture, in Catholic and Orthodox tradition, it is

believed to be Mount Tabor.

83. *Ibid.*, pg. 286.

84. The Sufis are a mystical sect within Islam.

85. *Ibid.*

86. Millard J. Erickson, *The Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2001, s.v., "Hesychasm," pg. 88, emphasis added.

87. *Is Eastern Orthodoxy Christian?*, op. cit., pp. 54-55. This quotation is part of a larger discussion that begins on pg. 50.

88. Anthony M. Coniaris, *Philokalia: The Bible of Orthodox Spirituality: Orthodox Spirituality for the Lay Person*. Minneapolis: Light and Life Publishing Company, 1998, pg. 3.

89. *Ibid.*, pg. 2.

90. *Ibid.*, pg. 3.

91. *The Orthodox Church*, op. cit., pg. 96.

92. *Ibid.*, pg. 97.

93. Anonymous Pilgrim, *The Way of a Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues His Way*, translated by R.M. French. New York: HarperCollins, 1991, pg. 10.

94. *Philokalia*, op. cit., pg. 6.

95. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

96. *The Truth*, op. cit., pg. 15, note 5.

97. *The Orthodox Church*, op. cit., pg. 37.

98. *The Faith*, op. cit., pg. 247, italic in original.



EDITORIALS

(continued from page 2)

of Matthew 5:21-48 pits Jesus against rabbinical interpretation and teaching. Rabbis of old taught certain things that other rabbis handed down, but Jesus, by His inherent authority, boldly proclaims, "but I say unto you."

Further, all through Matthew 5, Jesus quotes the Torah (Old Testament Law), but then adds, "but I say unto you." At the very least He is putting Himself on par with the Torah. More realistically, however, is that He is suggesting He is greater than the Torah by repeating after the Old Testament quotes, "but I say unto you." This is very un-Jewish and many Jewish scholars are very unhappy with what Jesus said and how He said it.

What did Jesus actually mean when He repeated, "but I say unto you"? Author John Reisinger offers this:

"It seems quite evident that Christ is actually saying far more in the Sermon on the Mount than just 'This is what Moses really meant.' Christ is saying, 'I am in no way destroying or criticizing Moses. I am applying his commandments in an area and in a manner that neither he nor his law covenant could ever have done. I am also giving My disciples new laws that make moral and spiritual demands that are based entirely on grace instead of the Old Covenant of law.' In establishing these points we

will avoid the two extremes that lead to serious and opposite errors. On the one hand, we will protect the true 'unity of the Scriptures' and not have Christ contradicting Moses, and on the other hand, we will not limit the authority of Christ by making Him to be a mere 'rubber stamp' of Moses. We will allow Christ to give new and higher truth that Moses never gave" (*But I Say Unto You*, pp. 3-4).

In another event, Jesus disregarded the Sabbath (Luke 6:6-11). Charles Ryrie notes: "Not only had Christ claimed deity (5:20), but now He claimed sovereignty over the Sabbath day and its laws, and asserted His right to interpret its laws without reference to the traditions of the Pharisees" (*The Ryrie Study Bible*, note on Luke 6:5). Jesus also took the liberty of changing the meaning of the elements of the Passover. He applied the meaning of the bread and wine to Himself (Matthew 26:26-28; 1 Corinthians 5:7). He redirected the centrality of the symbol of the lamb and changed the meaning of other symbols.

Many of the Jewish rabbis of today are ultra-liberal. Even the studies of Jesus they are involved with are incomplete when it comes to Jesus. Liberal Judaism today is simply an updated Ebionism. Jewish rabbis are not much interested in the risen Jesus of Christianity or the Apostle Paul. (See further, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus, An Analysis and Critique of Modern Jewish Study of Jesus* by Donald A. Hagner.)

So let's return to the issue of: *Which Judaism?* There have been and are, in fact, many Judaisms. Even within Orthodox Judaism there are myriad sects, isms, and competing dynasties. There is fierce competition and little agreement in the world of Jewish Orthodoxy. This has always been. Jewish rabbi Stephen M. Wylen observes: "Judaism in the time of Jesus was extraordinarily diverse" (*The Jews in the Time of Jesus*, pg. 133). That diversity continues. Samuel Heilman's book, *Who Will Lead Us? The Story of Five Hasidic Dynasties in America*, makes it clear that Orthodox Jews do not always get along.

Hagner addresses the multiplicity of Judaisms: "Are there not varieties of Jewish perspectives and differing portraits of Jesus? The answer is, of course, yes" (*The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus*, pg. 15).

Based on the great number of ancient Jewish scrolls in different languages, Randall Price and Wayne House conclude: "They also reveal that Judaism was hardly monolithic in the Second Temple period and that no one kind can necessarily be assumed as normative for the rest. In other words, the diverse elements that characterized intertestamental Judaism will not permit lumping together their beliefs into a singular Jewish theology. Moreover, the scrolls reveal that Second Temple Judaism, although an heir of biblical Judaism, was no more identical to it than to later rabbinic Judaism" (*Zondervan Handbook of Biblical Archaeology*, pg. 222).

First-century Judaism (the Judaism of Jesus' time) had Sadducees and Pharisees, Essenes and Zealots. Some followed Hillel and some followed Shammai. There were Herodians and there were Jesus followers as well as followers of John the Baptizer. More importantly, there is no first-century Judaism today. The Temple and priesthood are gone, along with the sacrificial system. The majority of Jews live outside the land of Israel. So many of the commandments and promises are only to take place in the land of Israel. Judaism as it exists now is not the same Judaism of Christ's time. Commenting on first-century Judaism, Rabbi Wylen states that, "first century Judaism ... is not the same as Judaism as it exists now. Neither is it the same as the Judaism of the time of the Hebrew scriptures" (*The Jews in the Time of Jesus*, pg. 4).

This drives us back to the issue of *which Judaism* are we to impose on Gentiles being seduced into the HRM? The answer, according to Acts 15, is clearly no Judaism at all, much less today's rabbinic Judaism. The issue has really been settled 2,000 years ago when the temple system was destroyed and the priests put out of a job.

What was Jesus actually saying when He said, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me ... For My yoke is easy and My burden is light"? (Matthew 11:29, 30) A rabbi's yoke was his teachings. Jesus was saying that we should embrace His teachings. Those teachings would be clearly written and preserved in the New Covenant,

made clear by the indwelling illuminating Spirit and our obedience enabled by grace.

To keep the Old Testament law code in force, some point to Matthew 5:17 and the words of Jesus: "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." The verse is treated as if there are only two options. Those two options are: keep the Old Testament law in force or destroy it. Those who see only two options are missing the third option. Jesus says that He came to "fulfill" the Law (and the Prophets) as option number three. In verse 18, Jesus speaks of not one jot or tittle passing from the Law until all is fulfilled. Where does the law find its complete fulfillment?

Jesus is speaking of bringing the Law to fulfillment in Himself. He came to fulfill the Law. He brings the Law to its ultimate fulfillment and obeys it perfectly. He brings the Law to its intended meaning. He fulfills its prophecies, and thus fulfills their meaning. He Himself is the ultimate fulfillment of future prophecies. Hagner rightly says, "It is Jesus' words that ultimately contain and preserve the eternal content of the Law and the Prophets" (*The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus*, pg. 126).

If no one can answer the question as to which Judaism, then the second question cannot be answered in any sensible or coherent way. If no decision can be given on which Judaism, how could anyone come close to answering: *Just how much?* In the end it is an arbitrary pick and choose game. It is just subjective pieces of guesswork.

There are many self-appointed, ad hoc leaders in the HRM and their followers are at their mercy. There is no consistent doctrinal standard or standard for practice. Everything is left to the imagination and creativity of the leader.

This is so because those who rise to the top of HRM leadership teach independently, subjectively, and creatively. They decide things such as: Should followers wear prayer shawls? Should they keep Sabbath? Are kippahs necessary? Should they study Talmud? Should they call their ministers "rabbi"? Should they call their places of worship "synagogues"? Last but not least, what about all the material in Acts to Revelation? What is to be done with that? In the end, wherever the HRM leader goes, the HRM sheep follow.

All this simply points out yet another major flaw in the HRM. There is no clear distinction and articulation of New Testament commands versus late arriving Jewish traditions. Obviously the punishment sections in the Torah laws are ignored. There is just a muddy mix of guess work and confusion spawned by those who for various reasons and in various ways have become the "experts" and the final word.

Which Judaism? And How much? Clearly this is the Achilles' heel of the HRM.

—GRF

wouldn't be flying via commercial airlines or waiting in long Transportation Security Administration lines, but would own His own private jet.

Recently, the Louisiana-based televangelist asked his followers for \$54 million in donations to purchase a Dassault Falcon 7X aircraft. The Falcon 7X is a large-cabin, business jet with a nautical mile range of nearly 6,000 miles. It is the largest aircraft of Dassault Aviation's Falcon line.

Duplantis argues that his current jet, a Dassault Falcon 50, which was purchased in 2006, requires multiple stops to refuel. That mid-sized, long-range business jet is advertised as having a range of about 4,000 nautical miles. Duplantis alleges that the new aircraft is needed so that he can "go anywhere in the world in one stop." He also says the new plane will allow him to fly for "a lot cheaper" because he has his "own fuel farm" and won't have to "pay those exorbitant prices for jet fuel all over the world."

Incentive for purchasing the new jet, according to Duplantis, is from the Lord Himself. "It was one of the greatest statements He ever told me. ... He said, 'I want you to believe Me for a Falcon 7X,'" Duplantis said in a video posted on his ministry website.

Duplantis' appeal for this new aircraft comes just months after the ministry of his friend and fellow prosperity teacher Kenneth Copeland purchased a multi-million-dollar Gulfstream V jet.

—MKG

DATA PRIVACY LAWS IMPOSED ON JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

Door-to-door proselytizing by Jehovah's Witnesses in Europe just became a bit more restrictive. In July, the European Union supreme court ruled that members of the Watchtower Society are required to comply with data protection rules when engaged in their doorstep preaching activities. What this means is that Jehovah's Witnesses will now have to obtain consent from those with whom they interact before being allowed to write down any personal details acquired during the conversation.

Jehovah's Witnesses often gather personal information and take notes on those they encounter in their proselytizing efforts. This includes names, addresses, family details, and religious background.

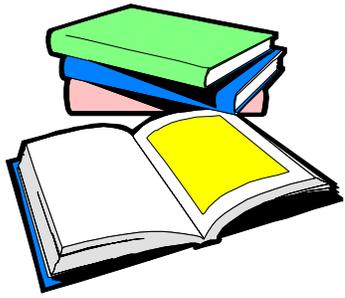
The Watchtower argued that its doorstep preaching should be viewed as a personal religious activity, and any information derived from those encounters should be also considered personal. If data is collected for purely personal means, it is exempt under EU law. However, the Court of Justice of the European Union responded in its ruling that the religious activity of Jehovah's Witnesses does not come under the exemptions granted to personal data collection.

According to a Reuters news report, the EU supreme court ruling in July came about "after Finland in 2013 banned Jehovah's Witnesses from collecting personal data during door-to-door visits."

—MKG

PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH — STATEMENT OF BELIEF

- I. THE BIBLE AS THE DIVINELY INSPIRED, INERRANT WORD OF GOD: IT IS IN ITS ENTIRETY THE SOLE AUTHORITY FOR ALL MATTERS OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF AND PRACTICE.
- II. THE ONE TRUE GOD. IN THE ONE TRUE GOD THERE EXIST THREE PERSONS, BEING: THE FATHER, THE SON JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- III. JESUS CHRIST: HIS DEITY, HUMANITY, VIRGIN BIRTH, SINLESSNESS, DEATH AND BODILY RESURRECTION; WHO WILL PERSONALLY AND VISIBLY RETURN AGAIN TO EARTH.
- IV. THE PERSONALITY AND DEITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- V. THE EXISTENCE AND PERSONALITY OF SATAN, HIS TOTAL OPPOSITION TO GOD, AND HIS POWER OVER THE UNREGENERATE.
- VI. THE COMPLETE AND TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF ALL MEN WHICH MAKES THEM HOPELESSLY LOST WITHOUT THE NEW BIRTH OBTAINABLE THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.
- VII. THE FINAL ESTATE OF MAN: FOR THE SAVED, EVERLASTING LIFE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND FOR THE UNSAVED, EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT BECAUSE OF THEIR UNBELIEF.
- VIII. THE GOSPEL BY WHICH WE ARE SAVED BEING SUMMED IN THE DEATH, BURIAL AND RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.
- IX. THE CHURCH BEING THE BODY OF CHRIST, UNITED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, CONSISTING OF THOSE WHO HAVE RECEIVED JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOR. A LOCAL CHURCH IS AN ORGANIZED ASSEMBLY OF BELIEVERS UNITED FOR THE PURPOSE OF CARRYING OUT THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST.
- X. THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST BEING TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO ALL MEN, BAPTIZING AND DISCIPLING THOSE WHO HAVE BELIEVED.



Books in Review

10 MISTAKES PEOPLE MAKE ABOUT HEAVEN, HELL AND THE AFTERLIFE

by Mike Fabarez

Harvest House Publishers, 200 pages, \$13.99

Books about heaven, hell, and the afterlife have become dominant in the Christian marketplace. From the purported accounts of persons who say they have visited heaven or hell to more “theological” works that stretch the biblical record by using the testimony of the visions of modern-age mystics such as Teresa of Ávila, the believer faces an assortment of claims about what lies beyond death’s door. So, a book such as Pastor Mike Fabarez’s is a welcome relief.

Fabarez is committed to confining what he offers in his book exclusively to the Word of God. “The Bible may not tell us everything our curious minds want to know about what lies beyond the grave, but it has given us plenty of data to dispel a ton of popular misconceptions, to keep us from believing misleading myths, and to assure our hearts when the appointment with our Maker arrives,” he writes in the Introduction (pg. 14).

The volume is a great apologetic resource that takes on a variety of beliefs, which he labels “mistakes,” that correspond to the end-of-life worldviews of not only those of our modern anti-Christian culture, but also of Catholics, cultists, such as Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses, and “so-called Christian leaders” such as Rob Bell, author of *Love Wins*.

The book contains numerous illustrations as Fabarez responds to syncretism (all roads lead to heaven), soul sleep, purgatory, and annihilation. In his discussion of purgatory, he notes, “Roman Catholics can be commended for understanding the gravity of sin. But how misguided and unbiblical not to recognize that the torture that justice demands has already been paid for by Jesus himself” (pg. 61). He also surveys what heaven will be like (more specifically the new heaven and the new earth) and includes an exposé of the make-up of our resurrected bodies (they will be ageless, beautiful, tireless, and sinless). And he provides the biblical witness

as to the intermediate state — the time between death and the resurrection — when we exist as bodiless spirits.

The last chapter on heaven answers the “mistake” that we can sin our way out of heaven. While this may seem an odd idea to some, Fabarez notes that Adam and Eve were in a perfect environment and sinned, as were Lucifer and the demons who followed him. Fabarez takes this opportunity to present a brief study on the doctrines of justification, regeneration, and glorification. He notes that in our glorified state, ours will be a different kind of union with God than that of Adam and Eve in the Garden. And, in one of the few places where he steps outside the testimony of Scripture, he states, “Though the Bible does not describe the details of this difference, the philosophical minds of deep theologians, from Augustine to Jonathan Edwards, have concluded that the innocent state of Adam and Eve had a vulnerability that those united with Christ in eternity will not have” (pg. 110).

Much of the second half of the book turns from heaven to hell. Too many have been influenced by the “current climate of our society” which maintains that “if you believe the things in the Bible that have sharp edges, you are labeled a hate-monger and an evil person” (pg. 119). Presented are the vivid descriptions from Scripture of hell and eternal punishment. After reading this section, it is amazing that anyone could argue that the Bible teaches soul sleep and annihilation. In these chapters we are warned about the writings of Rob Bell and Brian McLaren and entrusted to the writings of men like Albert Mohler and Robert Peterson. Also examined is the reality that there will be degrees of punishment in hell. Fabarez is again effective in his arguments, drawing from several defenses and illustrations, including the distinction of punishments in relation to Old Testament laws.

In his final chapter, Fabarez considers the practice of cremation and its increasing popularity over burial. He says cremation is unbiblical and “that it would be wise for us as Christians to give thought about the connection between our practices and our theology” (pg. 177). His reasons are challenging and shouldn’t be dismissed easily.

It is also in this section that Fabarez makes a passionate plea that the modern (Christian) funeral service should not be a celebration of life, with “jokes and vacation stories” and laughter as “the goal of every eulogy,” but that we rather “take a good look at the painful problem death actually is — theologically and personally” (pg. 183). His proposal is thought-provoking indeed.

—MKG

Editor’s Note: The publications featured in PFO’s *Books in Review* section are available from **Personal Freedom Outreach** (P.O. Box 26062, Saint Louis, Missouri 63136). Please add \$3.00 to the price listed for shipping and handling. Due to occasional price changes by the publishers, the retail amounts listed are subject to change without notice. These publications are also available to those who help to financially support the work of PFO. Please see our funds appeal flyer for details.