

COMING HOME?

Evangelical Issues for the Eastern Orthodox

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Having been a student for some time of Church History in general and Historical Theology in particular, I have been forced to develop an appreciation for the complexities involved with the growth of the Christian religion since the first century. When one considers the Judaic heritage from which the Christian movement sprung, the Hellenistic influence on first century Judaism, the diverse cultural context(s) in which the New Testament church flourished, the development of the New Testament canon, the early church's understanding of apostolic tradition, and the hermeneutical considerations regarding that tradition/Scripture, a plethora of corresponding issues and questions come to the fore. It is for this reason that I stand amazed at the rather simplistic and profoundly naive assertions made by otherwise enthusiastic converts to Eastern Orthodoxy of late. In his book "Coming Home," the now "Bishop Peter Gillquist" of the Antiochian archdiocese provides the reader with testimony after testimony of former Protestants who are grateful that they have finally found "the True Church." As a Pastor, I can appreciate their enthusiasm over the importance of truth and their desire to be "where God wants them to be" (if I can phrase it in such a distinctly "evangelical manner"). My concern for these individuals however, and those who read their stories, is that, in their minds, the Church of Jesus Christ seems to have gained some historical or geographic center, somewhere around Constantinople (or is that Istanbul?), or for those with Slavic sympathies, Moscow ("the third Rome"); or has it since moved again? Forgive the coy manner in which I relate this concern, but it is intentional. At a seminar given by a Protestant convert to Orthodoxy a few years back (Fr. Timothy Cremeens), we both agreed that when it comes to the doctrine of the Church, I was a minimalist and he a maximalist; conversely, when speaking of the doctrine of salvation, I was a maximalist and he a minimalist.

This is not to say that Fr. Cremeens (or Orthodox people in general) do not have a great appreciation for the doctrines relating to man's redemption, or that Evangelicals such as myself lack an appreciation for the Church. The central concern here involves the nature of the Church of God and how that affects one's understanding of the gospel of God. The issue can be just as validly stated the other way around; "... or is it the gospel that affects our understanding of the Church?" Historically speaking, which is the proverbial "chicken" and which is the "egg?" And which came first?

In assessing the testimonies of converts to Orthodoxy, I am stricken by limitations of testimonials. They are so ... human. It does not take one long to realize that when one "becomes this" when he was "once that;" there is a certain shock value which is too often employed by the convert as some evidence of the veracity of that which he now promotes. "I became Orthodox because Protestantism was too fractured." "I became Orthodox because Evangelicals were too historically disconnected." "I became Orthodox because I longed for a deeper sense of the holy." Yes, reasons abound. Among Evangelical communions, there are local churches who act as if the Church began when their particular congregation was founded. For these people, the effective "start date" for Christianity can be discovered by simply checking out the numbers decoratively inscribed on the cornerstone of their church building. It is true that Evangelical worship can be shallow and man-centered. It is also true that doctrinal aberrations exist among some Evangelical teachers and ministries. It is true that a balanced appreciation for the value of beauty and aesthetics in the worship of God is lacking among many of the folks who bear the name "Protestant." These are human realities. Equally human are the realities of nationalism or liturgical triumphalism within Orthodox communities. Equally fallible are the ethnic enclaves that too many Orthodox parishes have become. Equally concerning is the abject Biblical illiteracy among both laity and clergy within Orthodox ranks. Equally confusing is the American jurisdictional nightmare that flies in the face of both canon law as well as Orthodoxy's stated beliefs about the visible dimension of the church and the need for "one bishop in one city."

It does not logically follow that the existence of fallacies or inconsistencies within a faith communion should justify one's departure into another. The unsettling fact that the word "conversion" can refer to either a work of the Spirit (hence, legitimately leading to one's baptism into the Body of Christ) or a sociological phenomenon (hence, illegitimately leading one to identify them self with a particular group) should only remind us of what Jesus meant when He related the parable of the wheat and the tares (see: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). People enter into the wrong churches for the right reasons and the right churches for the wrong reasons. As the Orthodox are so fond of saying, "God gave the right faith to the wrong people." But aren't the people the Church?

The purpose of this article is to prompt the reader to serious thought about the issues which relate to the claims of Orthodoxy. A more detailed analysis of these various issues will follow in subsequent articles. It should suffice to say at this point that while people in churches are imperfect (we all know this) there is a perfection, a "trueness," a

"rightness" about the Church to which Christians from Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic traditions gravitate. This "rightness" goes by many names theologically, but ultimately refers to the Biblical portrait of the Church as the Bride of Christ, which the Apostle Paul comments on in the most profound of ways when he writes:

that He (Christ) might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless (Ephesians 5:27).

The fact that it exists is common to all three communions. The nature of what that "rightness" is has been the subject of debate for many a century. However, it is this very distinction that determines whether the "church" with which one unites is truly "home" from heaven's point of view.

This series of articles are dedicated to those who are truly seeking. Those who hold to their "traditions" with the arrogant tenacity that only carnality can produce will hardly be helped by this series of written discourses. I do not advocate any form of relativism when it comes to the truth of God, but an open honesty that grapples with the issues instead of asserting the old apologetic "party line." Frankly, this does not impress me; and I suspect, does not satisfy the honest reader. God's truth is objective and knowable, but it cannot be understood apart from the operation of the Holy Spirit and cannot be "proof texted" by either passages of Scripture or by quotations from the Church Fathers or our favorite theologians. The tenacity with which I hold to the gospel is a result of the tenacity with which God holds me by His grace. As I encounter any system that undermines the revealed nature of that grace, I offer a passionate polemic rather than a defensive diatribe. Paul expressed these same sentiments when he wrote to the Galatians:

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ for a different gospel; which is really not another, only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! (Galatians 1:6-8).

Paul did not hate the Judaizers, who were, historically, the culprits behind this disturbance among the churches of Galatia. His concern was passionate of heart and pastoral in purpose. The condemnation upon those who rejected the truth of the gospel was not something he had the power to pronounce but the authority to announce; for the gospel is not a matter of confusion; it is the clear, perspicuous message of the grace of God to sinners. And it is at the core or heart of the Christian message. It is pointless to dispute the nature of the Church or to proclaim to others that you have "found it" if the very truth of what brings one into the very Body of Christ is obscured. I have found that the Achilles heel of the Orthodox presentation of theology (not merely the propositional

truths rightly deduced from Scripture, but the truth about God, His work and His world in its dynamic outworking as well) whether in the written word or the celebrated liturgy, is its assignment of the substance of the saving gospel of God to the periphery of its concerns. Redemption is simply not at the top of Orthodox theology's priority list. In response to the critic, this is not to say that Orthodoxy relegates redemption to an unimportant status, but to a functionally secondary status due to the constructs of its theology of man, and subsequently, the Church. These issues will be examined more closely in upcoming articles.

In the midst of the apologetic dogfight in which many Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox writers engage, I have found it beneficial to "step back from the forest to be able to see all of the trees." Obtaining a sense of the bigger picture more responsibly sets the issues in their proper context, taking the human dimension relating to the claims of Orthodoxy (or Evangelicalism for that matter) into consideration alongside the Biblical and historic dimensions. In this spirit, I would like to offer some issues for consideration before we engage in the particulars (and sometimes the minutiae) of answering the question; "have those who converted to Orthodoxy really come home?"

ISSUE ONE: *The Demonizing of the West*

Whether one is reading the classic works of Orthodox theologians such as Vladimir Lossky, Sergei Bulgakov, Georgii Florovsky, or prominent Orthodox thinkers writing in the West such as John Meyendorff, Alexander Schmemmann, or Timothy Ware, the vilification of anything Western (or Latin) permeates the assertions and assumptions found on every page. Converts to Orthodoxy such as Frank Schaeffer repeat this refrain in warning against a "western captivity" of the Church. The deleterious effects of the Enlightenment upon the now "depraved" Western culture and the harmful fallout of the Reformation on religion, viewed as nothing more than the bastard child of "Age of Reason," is the Orthodox's historical "I told you so" for unsuspecting westerners. This gross caricature of western culture is as offensive as it is lopsided. One cannot seriously call it naive or misinformed, specifically on the part of "cradle Orthodox," for that would be too kind in light of the facts they demonstrate a sufficient awareness of.

The contributions of the Latins in the formative centuries of the Christian Church, as well as their continued testimony substantively to the very things which count as foundational Christian doctrine as well as to those things which the Orthodox to this day count dear cannot be discounted. Have Western confessions denied the trinity; the very core of Orthodox belief? Oh yes, reply the Orthodox, for the inclusion of the filioque clause has distorted the Western understanding of the essence of the godhead. However, this depends on who in the Orthodox Church you ask. Opinions on this matter differ from the extreme position of Lossky who extends the adverse effects of this "heresy" of double procession to ecclesiastical considerations, to the more moderate position which views double procession as possessing the potential to lead logically to all sorts of

doctrinal difficulties, despite the "blessed inconsistencies" on the part of Latins to affirm an otherwise orthodox understanding of the godhead. Yet, it must be remembered that the initial inclusion of the clause has a historical context.

The response of the Western Church to the Arian and Sabellian heresies has, even in the minds of some Orthodox scholars, justified such an expression. Anyone familiar with the development of Christian theology must honestly admit that the reactive nature of initial dogmatics has required further clarification in subsequent periods. Unfortunately, the proper considerations for such historical context has been granted by and large to Eastern Fathers but has been withheld from their Western counterparts with occasional violence. It is often either overlooked or minimized on the part of Orthodox writers, that Eastern Fathers such as Epiphanius and Cyril of Alexandria can be fairly understood to have supported the filioque, in fact, Maximus the Confessor writes in his letter to Marinus of Cyprus that the Latins do not make the Son the Spirit's "cause," but that they are aware that the Father is the sole Source of the Son and Spirit. Augustine, who has been the target of much attack by Eastern writers regarding his adherence to the doctrine of the double procession of the Spirit is careful to retain the principality of the Father's role in the Spirit's procession and is in essential agreement with the Cappadocian understanding. In regard to seminal matters pertaining to the ontological trinity, have we forgotten that it was Hosius of Cordova (a Spaniard) who first proposed the term homoousios at Nicaea to define the relationship between the Father and the Son? Although this term had a "shadier" history prior to Nicaea, it gained full acceptance through the collateral efforts of the Cappadocians, Athanasius and Hilary of Poitiers (another Latin!) and is now a standard for Nicene orthodoxy. This incident demonstrates the shared contributions of Latin and Greek Christians in the development of Christian doctrine in its formative period.

For those who would protest at this point and claim that this example arises from Christian history prior to the emergence of a distinctive Byzantine theology (which Meyendorff correctly states is post-Chalcedonian); two responses are in order. First, the purpose for the above illustration is to promote the sorely needed concept of a "shared theological tradition" of doctrinal development and historic orthodoxy, and that, both within, prior to, and following the critical fourth century, such mutual contributions to the shaping of that which "has been believed everywhere, always and by everyone," as the Vincentian Canon declares, speak loudly against this functional denial of all things western. Second, there are enough examples of later western contributions and theological traditions which testify of doctrinal fidelity both equal and superior to Eastern traditions that earlier and more seminal illustrations can be afforded in such a presentation. For example, let us consider the issue of mystery in theology (and particularly, theology proper); specifically the apophaticism of the Eastern Church. The principle of negation in Orthodox theology has long been touted as central to its understanding of God, as His absolute transcendence reduces human speculations about

Him into idols, unless our contemplation of Him takes on a mystical dimension. Lossky comments on this perspective when he writes:

No one who does not follow the path of union with God can be a theologian. The way of the knowledge of God is necessarily the way of deification. He who, in following this path, imagines at a given moment that he knows what God is has a depraved spirit, according to St. Gregory Nazianzen. Apophaticism is, therefore, a criterion: the sure sign of an attitude of mind conformed to truth. In this sense all true theology is fundamentally apophatic (Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p. 39).

While Lossky admits (as does Orthodoxy theology as a whole) a function to cataphatic theology, he describes it as a necessary reversal to the function of apophaticism: the former being a condescension of God through energies by means of "analogical theophanies" culminating in the incarnation of God in Christ, who embodies the supreme eminence of these manifestations of God in creation, and the latter being a path to union with those energies which is the very purpose for man's existence.

However, the Orthodox continue their condescending and historically exaggerated attack on "western confessions" citing the exaltation of reason and the elimination of mystery as intrinsic aspects of the Latin theological heritage. Consider Khomyakov's rantings:

Since the conflict between the Western confessions has been conducted on the soil of rationalism, one cannot even say that faith has been its real subject. Beliefs and convictions, no matter how sincere and passionate, have yet to deserve the name of faith (Aleksei Stepanovich Khomyakov, *On The Western Confessions of Faith*. In *Ultimate Questions*, Alexander Schmemman, editor, p. 64).

Speaking specifically of the Protestants, he writes:

A criticism that is serious but dry and imperfect; a learning that is broad but unsubstantial because of its lack of inner unity; an upright and sober morality worthy of the first centuries of the Church, combined with a narrowness of vision set within the limits of individualism; ardent outbursts of feeling in which we seem to hear a confession of their shortcomings and their lack of hope in ever attaining atonement; a constant lack of depth scarcely masked by a fog of arbitrary mysticism; a love of the truth combined with an inability to understand it in its living reality; in a word — rationalism within idealism: such is the fate of the Protestants (Aleksei Stepanovich Khomyakov, *On The Western Confessions of Faith*. In *Ultimate Questions*, Alexander Schmemman, editor, p. 64-65).

Such preposterously lopsided caricatures of western confessions (in this case, Protestantism) fail to consider the rich sense of mystery contained within both Catholic and Protestant figures and systems of thought and practice. In the midst of the Scholastic period, Aquinas' systematization of the contemplative life with respect to the mystical dimension of the faith, as well as his assertion of the *via negativa* in correlation to the apophatic emphasis in the East, demonstrates a serious acknowledgment of these two dimensions of theology. Although scholars like Jaroslav Pelikan attempt to solidify the superiority of Cappadocian apophaticism in regard to their usage of the *via eminentia* (although this is Thomas' term); it can be argued that Thomas' restriction of this apophatic function to the uniqueness of God avoids the undue skepticism that too often prevails in Orthodox epistemology, and more naturally leads to the necessary analogical function of theological language (which is richly expressed in the language of Scripture). As Timiadis insightfully comments:

Exaggerated mysticism could lead to the conclusion that God is so far removed from humanity that desperate efforts are required to obtain His intervention. We are then far from the OT promise to make us God's people, the New Israel, the redeemed heirs of His kingdom, endowed with Pauline *parousia*, brothers of one another by grace and bearers of the Spirit (*pneumatophoroi*) incorporated into Christ's Body and enjoying all the spiritual gifts that membership in the Church provides (E. Timiadis, *God's Immutability and Communicability*, in T. F. Torrance (ed) *Theological Dialogue between Orthodox and Reformed Churches*, p.47).

Paul Negrut, in considering the extent of the mystical and apophatic elements of Lossky's theology comments:

Lossky's belief that the intellectual faculties and conceptual reason cannot participate in the process of knowing God, not only gives a death blow to language as an epistemic tool and as a valid means of communicating the divine revelation, but actually upholds a reductionist view of anthropology and soteriology (Paul Negrut, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, London, 1994, p. 36).

Donald Bloesch issues a similar warning when he writes;

We must, of course, avoid the temptation of the neo-Platonic type of mysticism where God is so far beyond the categories of the understanding that he can be described only in terms of negation (as in pseudo-Dionysius). Though he does, of course, transcend human understanding, he does not totally elude rationality but instead embodies it. Because of the illumination of faith there can be a partial conformity of our ideas to the mind of God; this is an

analogical, not univocal, knowledge, but a true knowledge (Donald Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, Vol. 2, pp. 281,282).

The Western theological tradition has never denied wholesale the mystical component of the Christian faith, in fact, it has striven to harmonize the rational and mystical dialectic into an epistemic template which best corresponds to the revelation of these categories Biblically. Evangelicals (particularly in the Reformed tradition) do not sense the need to resort to rationalism in order to seriously grapple with the issues of the mind's interface with the Holy. Nor does it sense the need to adopt a wholesale mysticism in order to consider the mystical features of walking with God. Although the history of western Christianity has demonstrated a proclivity toward an overemphasis on the rational to the expense of the mystical, the East has equally demonstrated an opposite tendency. Perhaps these two traditions can learn something from one another on this issue in seeking to properly balance these two poles.

However, the consistent appeal to rationalism as the devilish foundation of the West's departure ignores the careful distinctions men like Aquinas (I purposefully use him as an example for he embodies the very medieval scholasticism that Orthodox apologists carelessly caricature) made regarding the power of reason to understand the mysteries of faith. Like Augustine (a figure equally derided in Orthodox circles), Thomas believed that faith was based in God's revelation in Scripture. He asserted that although God's existence is provable by reason (consistent with Paul's argument in Romans 1) sin obscures man's ability to know and believe in God. He further contends that there are mysteries such as the Trinity (which speaks to the very essence of God and not His energies, to use a Cappadocian distinction) and the incarnation of Christ which cannot be known by reason but by faith alone.

The Western expositions of the use and limits of reason and the categorization/systematization of doctrine is typically assumed to constitute an abject embracing of reason as the basis for our knowledge of God and is an unwarranted and assumptive leap. This post hoc fallacy which has gone largely unchallenged by Western Christians (and Evangelical Protestants in particular) illustrates the need for a more even-handed historical treatment that Orthodox defenders demand from westerners who charge certain characteristics of Orthodox theology (such as their apohaticism) of neo-platonism. If Eastern Fathers and writers used neo-platonic categories (which they undoubtedly did) and it does not stand to reason that their theology is by nature neo-platonic (and it does not), is it possible that such distinctions were made by later Western Fathers, doctors and theologians despite the polemical and categorical context in which they operated?

This issue represents a sorely needed reassessment of the West on the part of the Orthodox. The "adverse" affects of the Enlightenment should not be expounded without

an equal consideration of the beneficial aspects of the Latin use of Natural Theology within this context, which would protect against the popular Orthodox conclusion that the social, moral and intellectual evils which permeate Western Christian communities are of necessity endemic to them. Would it be fair to assert that Byzantine political intrigue, Marxism, Communism or any of the cultural nightmares that have plagued the East are endemic to Orthodoxy? Since Eastern Orthodoxy did not grow up in a vacuum, is it really credible to function under the assumption that Eastern culture following Byzantium was this theologically pristine incubator for the preservation of the apostolic faith? Many honest Orthodox question this functional assumption so prevalent in Orthodox literature and ecumenical dialogue. As one Orthodox leader confided at a recent conference, "Eastern Orthodoxy is more a Byzantine relic than the apostolic Church." Although this comment may be a bit extreme, it does identify a triumphalism that undermines the credibility of Orthodox apologetics within the larger sphere of Christendom.

ISSUE TWO: The Recovery of A Biblical View of and Place for Soteriology

Since the gospel is the heart of the Christian message; and the issue of justification is, as Luther rightly put it, "the article upon which the Church stands or falls," no meaningful assessment of Orthodoxy from a truly Evangelical perspective, or meaningful dialogue between the two communions can exist without an in-depth treatment of this issue.

J.N.D. Kelly summarizes the dilemma relating to a historic consideration of soteriology in general and the atonement in particular when he wrote:

The student who seeks to understand the soteriology of the fourth and early fifth centuries will be sharply disappointed if he expects to find anything corresponding to the elaborately worked out synthesis which the contemporary theology of the Trinity and the Incarnation presents ... Instead he must be prepared to pick his way through a variety of theories, to all appearance unrelated and even mutually incompatible, existing side by side and sometimes sponsored by the same theologian (J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 375).

Kelly goes on to note that, from his point of view, the "clue" to soteriology is not to despair, as some scholars have in seeking to find a "unifying theory" on redemption in this formative period, or to discover the so-called "patristic mind" on this critical subject. Although these theories appear incompatible, they are in fact complimentary in that they view the atoning work of Christ and the work of redemption from a number of different angles. In Orthodox - Protestant dialogue (as well as dialogue with Roman Catholics) it has long been the contention on the part of Eastern Christians that the "Augustinian scourge" of original sin, and the subsequent distortions of the Scholastics have placed the issue of justification particularly, but soteriology in general, in unduly

forensic categories. The two views of the atonement salient to our discussion here is that the of "classic" or "incarnational" view more prominent in the Christian East, and the "Latin" or "juridical" view which prevailed in the Christian West. The first view (also known as the "physical" or "mystical" view) emphasizes the connection between the redemption and the incarnation. The second view (also know as the "realist" view) views the atonement as primarily a penal substitution for the debt of sin owed to God.

It is critical to note that both theories appear in the writings of Greek and Latin Fathers, and that the cultural milieu of each segment of the empire affected the emphasis which each tradition would embrace. Kelly is correct in stating that the incarnational view "cohered well with the Greek tendency to regard corruption and death as the chief effects of the Fall." Moreover, the Latin insistence upon order and law are, arguably the historically guided direction in which the atonement and its collateral mechanics were perceived by those in the West.

Although these views exist contemporaneously in the Patristic literature, a number of issues need to be considered. First, the question of the perspicuity of Scripture on this issue. Paradox is not foreign to the Word of God, by any means, and yet, the Scriptural record is replete with over arching themes in regard to the core issues of God's message to man. There are few doctrines which are not viewed Scripturally from a number of complimentary angles. This is endemic to Hebrew literature and literary structure, (considering that the Old Testament constituted the "Scriptures" for the apostles and New Testament writers) and demonstrates the dimensional richness of God's revelation to man. An Evangelical student of Orthodoxy, Don Fairbairn issues this caveat for understanding the nature of Orthodox theory on the atonement:

As a result of the Orthodox emphasis on the idea of victory over death, evangelicals are likely to be critical of the Orthodox understanding of the atonement, since it seems to ignore the substitutionary, juridical elements which we believe are central to the work of Christ. However, it is not completely accurate to assert that the Orthodox ignore these elements. Orthodox theology does recognize the substitutionary aspects of the atonement which are so critical to evangelical thought, although it does not strongly emphasize them. The major difference between evangelical and Orthodox atonement theory lies not in the exclusive adherence to a single view, but in the way Eastern Christendom links the atonement to humanity's purpose of deification (Don Fairbairn, *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, p. 50).

This point is well taken, and is applicable to both communions since the Orthodox also exaggerate the view of Westerners in claiming either that their view of the atonement is solely juridical, or so principally so that it effectively ignores the more "cosmic" or "incarnational" realities of Christ's work. However, what cannot be avoided even in the

most balanced appreciation for the multi-dimensional approach to the atonement in the Patristic era, is that a prevailing notion of the work of Christ will surface and act as an interpretive grid as to the essence of what it means to come into relationship with God. This fact is also clear in the Biblical record. The heavy emphasis on the substitutionary nature of the sacrifice within the pre-Mosaic period as well as in the Levitical system is not only clear, but essential to any proper understanding of the earlier covenants. For instance, in his discussion of Orthodox worship, former Protestant minister Benjamin D. Williams, now a convert to Orthodoxy, expresses very telling comments:

Worship begins in heaven. The Holy Scriptures record numerous instances of the drama of the heavenly adoration taking place before the very throne of God. It may be that for the person familiar with Scripture, some of these are so apparent they are overlooked (Benjamin D. Williams, Harold B. Anstall, *Orthodox Worship*, p. 89).

He cites examples from the book of Isaiah (chapter six) where the seraphim cry "holy, holy, holy;" he cites the Apostle John's vision of the heavenly throne room in Revelation 4 and 5, and even makes mention of the coal taken from the altar and placed on Isaiah's lips, taking away his sins (which he claims the early fathers to understand as the eucharist), as well as the Son of God pictured as the Lamb having been slain (Rev. 5:11,12). Later in this same discussion, he notes:

By extension, then, it is only natural that our worship should be in keeping with the nature of worship in heaven. The constant struggle both in Israel and in Christendom has been to avoid affirming the methods which mankind proposes as the means to approach and worship God, and to accept that revelation which God Himself has given us, and to act on it. That is true theologically, and it is true liturgically as well. Our worship is based on revelation. The early Christian Church used the Old Testament revelation as its starting point, and fulfilled it with the new and final revelation in Jesus Christ (Benjamin D. Williams, Harold B. Anstall, *Orthodox Worship*, p. 90).

As Evangelicals, we agree in principle with what Williams is claiming. However, even a cursory examination of the passages he is citing as a basis for worship (which by nature is based upon and responsive to who God is and what He has done) presents grave difficulties for a former Protestant who has "come home" to a communion which sees "ascent to heaven" through *theosis* rather than the imputed righteousness of Christ as the basis for approaching God and worshipping Him!

Isaiah 6:1-7 sets a very juridical scene considering three things which comprise the passage:

(1) the proclamation of the holiness of God by the seraphim, which speaks of the purity and perfections of His Being and character as

opposed to sinful man. Bloesch acutely comments on this when he writes:

Holiness connotes separation from all that is unclean (from the Hebrew *qad osh*), and this applies to God par excellence. Rudolf Otto has trenchantly observed that the concept of the holiness of God leads to the assertion that God is "Wholly Other," since man is both a creature and a sinner. Indeed, man is separated from God not only by ontological fate but also by historic guilt. Our iniquities have made a separation between God and ourselves (Isa. 59:1,2), and therefore God can only be approached via a Mediator whose righteousness is acceptable to divine holiness, namely, Jesus Christ (Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, Vol. 1, p. 33). (Emphasis mine).

(2) This is expressed dramatically in the prophet's response, where he does not claim to be "unrealized" (a concept more akin with theosis), but "undone," precisely because both he and his people are "unclean" in the totality of their being (the proper application of the Hebrew idiomatic usage of "lips) and speaks of guilt and debt if considered within Hebraic categories.

(3) Finally, the touching of the prophet's lips with the coal from the altar cannot cryptically refer to some later sacramental conferring of grace through the eucharist, since the cleansing is viewed as complete in verse 7 and not in process, and the latter verses of the chapter (vv. 8-13) speak to the inability of men to respond rightly to the divine message, which would be a necessity if sacramental overtones are intended here.

The Revelation passages reveal more trouble for the Orthodox attempt to base worship on a conformity to the principal concept of theosis rather than a juridical model. In Revelation chapter 5, the Apostle John reports his vision of the heavenly throne room by introducing the issue of worthiness in verses 2-5. The One who is said to be "worthy" is the Lamb, who is slain, who takes the book from the hand of the One who sits on the throne (vv. 6,7). The angelic choir then sings a song to the Lamb in verse 9:

And they sang a new song, saying, Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals (this book is clearly tied to the concept of judgement, once again a legal category); for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

Williams' appeal to the Hebrews passages only compounds his troubles here. One hardly knows where to begin in considering the wealth of passages in this epistle which bear out the juridical nature of the author's themes. However, for the sake of brevity, I will cite two passages which speak directly to Williams' concerns for heavenly worship and the alleged eucharistic connection to Isaiah's vision in the Fathers:

For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; nor was it that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood not his own. Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation *He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself*. And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgement; *so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many*, shall appear a second time, not to bear sin, to those who eagerly await Him, for salvation (Hebrews 9:24-28 (emphasis mine))

Calvin comments on this passage thus (specifically verse 24):

But it is Christ who really presents himself before God, and stands there to obtain favour for us, *so that now there is no reason why we should flee from God's tribunal, since we have so kind an advocate, through whose faithfulness and protection we are made secure and safe*. Christ was indeed our advocate when he was on earth; but it was a further concession made to our infirmity that he ascended into heaven to undertake there the office of an advocate. So that whenever mention is made of his ascension into heaven, this benefit ought ever to come to our minds, that he appears there before God to defend us by his advocacy. Foolishly, then, and unreasonably the question is asked by some, has he not always appeared there? For the Apostle speaks here only of his intercession, for the sake of which he entered the heavenly sanctuary (Calvin's *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Emphasis mine)

As to alleged eucharistic connection or to any external substance to the "mysteries" connected with the atonement, I offer the following passage:

Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were thus occupied were not benefitted. We have an altar, from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned

outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Hence, let us go to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come. Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name (Hebrews 13:9-15).

Calvin makes this observation regarding verse 10:

"We have an altar", &c. This is a beautiful adaptation of an old rite under the Law, to the present state of the Church. There was a kind of sacrifice appointed, mentioned in the sixteenth chapter of Leviticus, no part of which returned to the priests and Levites. This, as he now shows by a suitable allusion, was accomplished in Christ; for he was sacrificed on this condition, that they who serve the tabernacle should not feed on him. But by the "ministers of the tabernacle" he means all those who performed the ceremonies. Then that we may partake of Christ, he intimates that we must renounce the tabernacle; for as the word "altar" includes sacrificing and the victim; so "tabernacle", all the external types connected with it. Then the meaning is, "No wonder if the rites of the Law have now ceased, for this is what was typified by the sacrifice which the Levites brought without the camp to be there burnt; for as the ministers of the tabernacle did eat nothing of it, so if we serve the tabernacle, that is, retain its ceremonies, we shall not be partakers of that sacrifice which Christ once offered, nor of the expiation which he once made by his own blood; for his own blood he brought into the heavenly sanctuary that he might atone for the sin of the world" (Calvin's *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Emphasis mine)).

These realities make astonishing the bold assertion by Orthodox theologian John Meyendorff:

In the East, the cross is envisaged not so much as the punishment of the just one, which satisfies a transcendent Justice requiring a retribution for man's sins. As Georges Florovsky rightly puts it: "the death of the cross was effective, not as a death of an Innocent One, but as the death of the incarnate Lord." The point was not to satisfy a legal requirement, but to vanquish the frightful cosmic reality of death, which held humanity under its usurped control and pushed it into the vicious cycle of sin and corruption (John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historic Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, p. 161).

What is truly concerning (particularly for Protestant converts to Orthodoxy) is that despite the wealth of Biblical evidence for man's salvation set primarily in terms of substitution and satisfaction; hence the imputed righteousness of Christ being the basis for man's approach to God in relationship or worship, the foundation moves to a process which is set in more neo-Platonic categories than Hebraic, and is built on scanty textual support. In fact, a careful examination of 2 Peter 1:4 (one of the two principle passages upon which theosis is built in explicit terms, along with John 10:34,35) demonstrates the need for "hermeneutical gymnastics" to yield the interpretation that Orthodox theology requires to substantiate the concept of "divination."

I hold to the Reformed view of salvation because it is Biblical. It permeates every page of Scripture, and beautifully ties the covenants together in a tapestry of fulfillment which Jesus claimed He would accomplish through His substitutionary death on the cross (Matthew 5:17), which Paul reminds us, the gospel is the message of (1 Corinthians 1:18). In having "come home;" have you traded in the very Word of the Cross? Consider well the words of the Apostle Paul:

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, *and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith* (Philippians 3:8,9 (emphasis mine))

This issue is not an academic discussion, but a matter of eternal life or death. The Scripture is clear on that matter upon which all other points are meaningful. If we do not know how to come into a relationship with God, all other considerations are terribly moot. I write this because I love and care for my Orthodox friends. This is not motivated by hatred or a desire to engage in needless disputations. There is much to appreciate and admire about Eastern Orthodoxy. However, on this essential point, the official teaching of the church is about as unorthodox as it gets, when measured by the standard of the Word of God, and not the varied opinions of men, whether they be Greek or Latin, ancient or contemporary.

Do not forget that the Roman Catholic Church, with its allegedly "juridical" emphasis, has still not escaped the error of confusing justification with sanctification. I find it ironic that distinctions within the godhead are considered reasons for schism within the Eastern Church; but the most important of distinctions is held in contempt.

Undoubtedly, the soteriological themes resident within Orthodoxy are important. Mystical union with God (in Christ), the process dimension of salvation (albeit in sanctification), the cosmic scope of God's salvation of men; these and other points deserve attention from the Evangelical community pertaining their balanced inclusion

into our collective consciousness of the richness of God's grace to us. Nonetheless, the overarching themes of salvation are certainly in fact according to Evangelicalism which has remained faithful to the Reformed tradition.

ISSUE THREE: A Biblical Resolution for the Issue of Authority in the Church

Although there are other issues to consider of great importance, I shall content myself in discussing a third and final point which addresses a major concern for those who have converted to, or are presently part of the Eastern Orthodox Church. This is the issue of authority. It is clear that Western and Eastern traditions view authority in a contrasting manner, and that many Orthodox writers have asserted that an external source of authority is not the issue but the internal authority of God's revelation through the operation of the Spirit within the community of the Body of Christ. This concept of Living Tradition or Holy Tradition is common within the Orthodox community. Kallistos Ware quotes Georges Florovsky in expressing the Orthodox conception of Tradition:

Tradition is the witness of the Spirit; the Spirit's unceasing revelation and preaching of good tidings ... to accept and understand Tradition we must live within the Church, we must be conscious of the grace-giving presence of the Lord in it; we must feel the breath of the Holy Ghost in it ... Tradition is not only a protective, conservative principle; it is, primarily, the principle of growth and regeneration ... Tradition is the constant abiding of the Spirit and not only the memory of words (Timothy "Kallistos" Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, pp. 198, 199)

The understanding of "tradition" in the history of the Church is complex and far from unanimous. In fact, four principle views of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition have been discovered in the church's historical record. The "coincidence view" teaches that Scripture is materially sufficient (it contains all that is necessary) but formally insufficient (it needs an authorized interpreter), but that the interpretation does not add to the written record. The "supplementary" view holds that Scripture is both materially and formally insufficient, and that oral or unwritten Tradition adds to the written Scripture. The "ancillary" view holds that Scripture is both materially and formally sufficient, and that Tradition neither authoritatively interprets Scripture nor supplements it. The "unfolding" view expresses the material insufficiency of both Scripture and Tradition, and that the Church can develop new dogmas as long as it can demonstrate that these were implicit in earlier teaching.

The position held by the Reformers is most certainly that of the ancillary view, which, while denying the equality of Tradition with Scripture (hence, the principle of *Sola Scriptura*), does view Tradition as helpful in understanding Scripture. Calvin speaks of

his respect for and familiarity with the writings of the Fathers in this ancillary fashion when he writes in his prefatory address to King Francis:

Then, with a frightful to-do, they overwhelm us as despisers and adversaries of the fathers! But we do not despise them; in fact, if it were to our present purpose, I could with no trouble at all prove that the greater part of what we are saying today meets their approval. Yet we are so versed in their writings as to remember always that all things are ours [1 Cor. 3:21-22], to serve us, not to lord it over us [Luke 22:24-25], and that we all belong to the one Christ [1 Cor. 3:23], whom we must obey in all things without exception [cf. Col. 3:20] (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Prefatory Address, 4)

In contrast, the Orthodox position is expressed by Florovsky;

It was in this sense that in the well known Encyclical Letter of 1848 the Eastern Patriarchs wrote that "the people itself (laos), ie: the Body of the Church, "was the guardian of piety." And even before this the Metropolitan Philaret said the same thing in his Catechism. In answer to the question. "Does a true treasury of sacred tradition exist?" he says, "All the faithful, united through the sacred tradition of faith, all together and all successively, are built up by God into one Church, which is the true treasury of sacred tradition, or, to quote the words of St. Paul, "The Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (Georges Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View*, p. 53. Emphasis his).

The problem here is that there are conflicting views of tradition in the history of the Church, and the position consistent with the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* is present even in the earliest periods of the Church. Irenaeus writes the following concerning authority and the transmission of authoritative knowledge concerning God and His gospel:

We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 3, Chapter 1.1)

Not to be misunderstood regarding the sufficiency of Scripture, he adds:

For it unlawful to assert that they [the apostles] preached before they possessed "perfect knowledge," as some do even venture to say, boasting themselves as improvers of the apostles (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 3, Chapter 1.1).

In regard to the perspicuity of Scripture, he writes:

Since, therefore, the entire Scriptures, the prophets and the Gospels, can be clearly, unambiguously, and harmoniously understood by all, although all do not believe them ... those persons will seem truly foolish who blind their eyes to such a clear demonstration, and will not behold the light of the announcement [made to them]...(Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 2, Chapter 27.2).

To further compound issues, the nature and content of Tradition is not unanimous amidst Orthodox theologians. Firstly, Orthodox scholars do not speak with one mind when relating the nature of Tradition: do Scripture and Tradition form a single source of authority or are they distinguished from one another? Konstantinidis holds to a "Two-Source" approach, while Ware holds to a "Single Source" view, which sees the Scripture as living and understood within the Church and not a source external to it, nor equally complimentary to Tradition, but as part of it. Secondly, the content of Tradition is also an issue to which Orthodox scholars and spokesmen speak in contrasting voices. For example, these same two scholars differ in terms of what they see as constituting Holy Tradition (see: C. Konstantinidis, *The Significance of the Eastern and Western Traditions*, p. 224 and T. Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, pp. 199-207). A careful examination of these two men's position on Tradition's content is certain to reveal substantial, and not semantical or peripheral differences.

Thirdly, no authorized canon of the Church Fathers exists. Although there were attempts to list approved leaders of the Church as pertaining to their faithfulness to the Apostolic faith, no council or canon has ever been officially accepted as forming a complete or current list of Church Fathers by the Eastern Orthodox Church. Since the Fathers are unanimously admitted to be a critical part of Holy Tradition, the vague and sometimes contradictory nature of Orthodoxy's appeal to "the Fathers" leaves this communion without an objective source of authority.

John Meyendorff admits to the apparently subjective nature of the Orthodox concept of Tradition;

In a way that is often puzzling for Western Christians, the Orthodox, when asked positively about the sources of their faith, answer in such concepts as the whole of Scripture, seen in the light of the tradition of the ancient Councils, the Fathers, and the faith of the entire people of God, expressed particularly in the liturgy. This appears to the outsiders as nebulous, perhaps romantic or mystical, and in any case inefficient and unrealistic (John Meyendorff, *Catholicity and the Church*, p. 100).

While such comments can be appreciated within the context of Meyendorff's (and Orthodoxy's) assertion that Tradition is living and dynamic, and is the function of the

life of the Spirit within the Church, it cannot be denied that this definition leaves Orthodoxy without an objective source of authority to which it can appeal.

Of graver concern is the connection between issues two and three; the gospel and the concept of authority for the Church. Harold O.J. Brown makes this penetrating observation:

In Matthew 15:9, citing Isaiah 29:13, Jesus warns against teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. In many respects the gospel message is, if we may say so reverently, too simple for us: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). Once I have believed, what then? Consequently we fill out and amplify the gospel message with the *mandata hominum*, the commandments of men. This is inevitable and necessary, as we have argued. But this is also dangerous. When tradition proliferates to trust in some human idea – a holy relic or particular pious devotion, for example – rather than in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, they may imperil their own salvation. This is the personal danger of tradition (Harold O. J. Brown, "Proclamation and Preservation", in *Reclaiming the Great Tradition*, p. 84).

The Reformed Protestant position does not eschew tradition as useless, as Brown rightly states, it simply rejects it as authoritative. "Traditions" are necessary in terms of the particulars of living out our faith, and may even express themselves in the distinctives of denominationalism (within the pale of orthodoxy with the small "o") but the essence of the faith is clear and centered on the Biblical truth of the gospel. The Orthodox Tradition obscures the gospel, for it is itself obscure and contradictory, subjective and mutable. It solves nothing that it claims to solve, for the presence of Tradition as an Interpreter of Scripture only serves to set back the problem one step: if the Bible needs an infallible Interpreter, who interprets the Interpreter?

The essence of Evangelical Protestantism is that the gospel and the God who it speaks of are knowable. God is not prostrate before reason, He transcends our intellects' ability to contain Him, as the famous axiom states, *finitum non capax infinitum* (the finite cannot contain the infinite), but we, as Evangelicals, do not prostrate ourselves before the altar of rationalism simply because we "reason through the Scriptures" (Acts 17:2,3,17) in the great tradition of the Apostle Paul, and "examine the Scriptures daily to see whether these things are so" (Acts 17:11). We subject our reason to the revelation of God and humbly trust in our Creator and Lord to grant to us the sufficient understanding of His Word to, as Paul said to Timothy,

give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:15).

No wonder that the very next two verses in this epistle read:

All Scripture is inspired by God [theopneustos: "God-breathed"] and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God [not the Church of God corporately] may be adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16,17)..

So, we return to our original question, somewhat restated: "what does it mean to truly come home?" Is "facing East" really necessary to belong to the true Church, or is it a matter of being "in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3ff)? I contend that in discovering the gospel the New Testament speaks of as clear and unambiguous, and embracing it by faith through a work of God in our hearts, we do more than find a Church, we become the Church. As the gospel transcends all cultures, so does the Church. God has not vested the East with catholicity (or the West for that matter), He has vested the Scriptures with it (2 Timothy 3:16,17), for in it we find propositionally all the fullness of knowing God as He has designed His people to, and through His Spirit, we dynamically live out that fullness. I urge all of you who have embraced Eastern Orthodoxy to drop the "Eastern" and the capital "O" and "come home" by trusting in the righteousness of Christ alone to bring you into the household of faith. For it is only by the "putting on of Christ" [hence, His righteousness] by the baptizing work of His Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27) [and not the chrism of the priest] through faith alone (Galatians 3:26) that we cry "Abba Father" (Galatians 4:6). It is then that we have truly "come home."