

understanding of the 'what' and the 'how' of salvation. If we neglect the personal fellowship which lies at the heart of the Trinity, if we do not seek to probe the mystery of Christ's person, then it is very easy for us to dissociate salvation from the doctrines of the Trinity and of Christ. In a worst-case scenario, salvation can become merely a set of goods (heaven, living forever, being sinless, etc.) which have no connection to Christ himself except that he procures these goods for us. The means of salvation can be reduced from a vibrant faith in Christ himself to a mere belief that he has done something to obtain salvation for us.

If one understands the 'what' and the 'how' of salvation in this reduced way, then clearly one is far from the picture which Jesus gives us when he says, 'Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent' (Jn. 17:3). Eternal life is to know God, to know Christ. Salvation does not merely come to us *through* Christ; salvation is Christ. What is heaven? It is many things, but primarily, it is to see Christ face to face and to know him even as he knows us (1 Cor. 13:12). What is forgiveness of sins? It is to be united to the one who took our sins upon himself in order to remove our guilt. Salvation is to have eternal fellowship with the Trinity, just as he has eternal fellowship within himself.

Of course, it is true that Western evangelical theology

at its best is far from the reduced statements of the nature and means of salvation which I have mentioned above, but it is also true that some popular evangelical thought succumbs to these pitfalls. A greater attention to the 'who' of salvation, to the personal relationship within the triune God and to the eternal person of Christ, could help ensure that we never fall into such traps. Such attention could also help us to see more clearly the magnitude of salvation: not just *what* God has done for us through Christ, but *whom* God has given us in Christ.

Orthodoxy is at its most biblical and most profound when explaining the Trinity and the person of Christ. By attending to the East on these issues, we can gain a much greater understanding of our own faith, and a much greater appreciation for the God whom we worship, than we might otherwise have had.

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Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism in dialogue¹

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Introduction

A re-evaluation of the role of communism in Eastern Europe has once more placed the Eastern Orthodox Church at the forefront of contemporary Christian thought. Missionaries from the West are meeting the Orthodox Church for the first time and often find themselves bewildered by its identity. Who are Orthodox Christians? What do they believe? Are they to be considered the friend or enemy of evangelical believers? These questions are not limited to western missionaries. Even well-established Protestant churches in traditional Orthodox Countries have struggled to obtain reliable answers on what the Orthodox Church believes and

how to best relate to it. Quite often, authentic Christian dialogue has been hindered by fear and ignorance on both sides. On the one hand, theologically unsophisticated Orthodox fear that all evangelicals belong to one great heretical sea of undifferentiated darkness; on the other hand, misinformed evangelicals sometimes fear that the Orthodox Church is nothing more than a cult. As these encounters between the two traditions unfold, one can see that a painful legacy of mutual ignorance exists. Can anything be done to fulfil Jesus' prayer that all his followers 'may be one, even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us' (Jn. 17:21)?

The purpose of this article is to build bridges between

the Orthodox and evangelical churches through an emphasis on theological education. I wish to facilitate the birth of the study of Eastern Orthodox theology into the theological curriculum of evangelical education, and promote a vigorous agenda of research on this subject among theological students in this generation. In the few pages I have been privileged to write, I will try to achieve this by showing why the study of Eastern Orthodoxy is important in evangelical higher education, and will identify contemporary trends in Orthodox/evangelical relations worldwide. These trends will reveal how major theologians from both traditions are beginning to explore their common ground in a dialogue that is sure to be one of the most intriguing conversations to emerge at the dawn of the third millennium.²

Why study the Orthodox church?

There are at least five reasons why evangelicals should study the Eastern Church.³ First, Eastern Orthodoxy numbers nearly 185 million adherents worldwide. Of these, 70 million are in Russia alone and 17 million in Romania (the second largest population of Orthodox Christians anywhere). In these and other traditionally Orthodox countries the Orthodox Church has had a profound influence on shaping the culture. Believers who attempt to engage Romania with the gospel must know the Orthodox Church as well as they would have to know Catholicism if living in Italy, Islam in Kuwait, or Mormonism in Utah (USA). More important, a second reason for studying Orthodoxy is because Orthodoxy can be viewed as a common ally with evangelical churches because of their common defence of the basic truths of historic Christianity. The Orthodox Church maintains a firm commitment to the major doctrines of the faith. The great ecumenical councils and creeds which defended the Trinity, Incarnation, bodily resurrection, and Second Coming were largely achievements of the Byzantine Church. While there are important differences which certainly should not be minimized, such as sacramentalism and the veneration of Mary, there is unanimous agreement on most of the essentials of the faith.⁴ Third, Orthodoxy is strongest where evangelicalism is weakest. A growing number of evangelicals have complained of experiencing reductionism, barrenness, or minimalism in their churches.⁵ There is a weak sense of tradition and lack of mystery in worship. In Orthodoxy, there is a strong sense of the majesty and mystery of God and a joyful celebration of the gospel in the liturgy. Fourth, evangelicalism is strongest where Orthodoxy is weakest. This is the converse of the last point. If rightly appropriated, evangelical scholarship can offer an intellectual credibility for the faith that is needed by modern Orthodoxy, especially in the area of biblical criticism and the clear proclamation of the gospel. The

Orthodox are just beginning to come to terms with biblical criticism and have too often uncritically accepted the conclusions of liberal Protestant or Catholic critics. We would do better to learn from evangelical experts because of their conservative meticulous scholarship.⁶ Fifth, a critical understanding of the Orthodox Church will enable evangelicals to know how to evangelize nominal Orthodox Christians without being divisive. They can also be in a better position to strengthen renewal movements within the Orthodox Church itself (such as the Lord's Army in Romania).⁷

Contemporary trends

Clearly evangelicals and members of the Eastern Church need a better understanding of each other. Among evangelicals there is a rising interest among important theologians and seminaries. Theologians include, among others, J.I. Packer, Paul Negrut, Thomas Oden, Miroslav Volf, Donald Bloesch, Kenneth Kantzer. In evangelical seminaries over the past five years a small number of courses on the Orthodox Church have begun to be offered. These include Fuller, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and Gordon Conwell (to name only a few of the better known). Moreover, a very stimulating course was team-taught as recently as last July by Dr. J.I. Packer and the present author at Regent College in Canada. It was, entitled 'Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism in Dialogue'. The very existence of such a course offered by a scholar of Dr. Packer's stature demonstrates that Orthodox/evangelical dialogue is not only a possibility, but is actually one of the most important ecumenical conversations in which evangelicals can engage. To be sure, work in this area is just beginning at all of these schools and the momentum must be patiently nurtured by qualified faculty; but the future is as bright as it has ever been in the history of evangelical theological education. Seminaries that develop curricular emphases in Eastern Christianity will be better prepared to offer a comprehensive perspective on global theology. A balanced theological education demands its inclusion.

Looking in the other direction, Orthodox seminaries that offer courses on evangelicalism are farther behind than evangelical seminaries, but even there one sees a growing desire to better understand evangelical identity. Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Seminary in Brookline, Massachusetts makes evangelical courses available to its students through its sister consortium school, Gordon Conwell Seminary. St. Nersius, an Armenian Orthodox seminary and sister school of St. Vladimir's in New York, invited an Armenian evangelical (Joseph Alexanian) to teach a course on evangelicalism in the book of Acts in the summer of 1994. Metropolitan Philip Saliba of the Antiochian Orthodox

Archdiocese took a bold step forward in this regard by asking the author to offer a new course to our Antiochian seminarians on 'Orthodoxy and American Evangelicalism'. The course is now offered every summer at the Antiochian House of Studies in Ligonier, Pennsylvania. If done wisely, more faculty exchange programmes would break down caricatures and stereotypes.

Finally, I wish to highlight several organizations and mission agencies which have emerged over the past decade that are dedicated to making the Orthodox and evangelical traditions known and understood in relation to each other. In July, 1995 the World Council of Churches sponsored their first international conference, convened in Alexandria, Egypt between representatives of Orthodox churches and people of evangelical commitment. This was a follow-up meeting from the WCC's Canberra Assembly in 1991 where it became apparent that evangelicals and Orthodox shared common doctrinal concerns over issues that denied the historic Christian faith. A follow-up meeting was held in April, 1998 in Hamburg, Germany. Another venture is 'Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding' (EMEU) based in Chicago. Much of their work is dedicated to raising the level of consciousness among North American evangelicals, informing them of the precarious existence of Eastern Christians living in the Middle East. Through conferences and study tours, EMEU has sought to bring together Middle Eastern and Western Christian leaders. Finally, the most theologically focused group of Orthodox and evangelicals today appears to be the 'Society for the Study of Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism' (SSEOE). This is a learned society which meets annually at the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College and hopefully soon at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Massachusetts. According to its Constitution, the SSEOE seeks to serve both the academy and the church by identifying the similarities and differences between the Orthodox and evangelical traditions in the areas of history, doctrine, worship, and spirituality. The Society has been given endorsements from world renowned leaders from both Orthodoxy and evangelicalism.

The sum of these and other attempts to build bridges demonstrates how Eastern Orthodoxy is emerging as a vital issue modern theology and missiology. Without minimizing our known and continuing differences in sacramental theology and ecclesiology, it is time for us to see that our two traditions are largely consistent with the creeds, councils, and fathers of the first millennium of Christian history. Our common cup is just as much half full as it is half empty. All of this, of course, assumes as I do that Orthodoxy and evangelicalism are compatible at the heart of the gospel. However, this can be demonstrated only through serious and sustained research in the area of comparative theology which is

beyond the scope of this essay. As we look to the future, let us harness the energy we have previously used against each other and combine it to work toward a common agenda. An unprecedented opportunity for growth, reconstruction, and renewal lies before us as we stand poised for one of the most fruitful theological encounters of the 21st century.

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Footnotes

1 This article was originally written for the forthcoming journal *Perichoresis*, published by the Emmanuel Bible Institute of Oradea, Rumania. It appears here by kind permission of the editor.

2 An introduction to the study of Eastern Orthodoxy written specially for evangelical students can be found in Bradley Nassif, 'New Dimensions in Eastern Orthodox Theology', forthcoming in *New Dimensions in Evangelical Thought: Essays in Honor of Millard Erickson*, edited David Dockery, (Inter Varsity Press, 1998). Though intended for a North American audience with little familiarity with European languages, it may serve as an introduction to the principal features of Orthodox theology and the methodological pitfalls to avoid when studying it.

3 If given a similar opportunity by my Orthodox brethren, I could just as easily have written an essay on why we Orthodox should study evangelical history and theology.

4 See the dialogue between Dr. J.I. Packer and the author in *Reclaiming the Great Tradition: Evangelicals, Catholics, and Orthodox in Dialogue*, edited James Cutsinger (Inter Varsity, 1997), pp. 155-184. (Since so little has been done in comparing Orthodox and evangelical theology, the author has (reluctantly) cited his own works in this article—works which he sincerely hopes will be expanded and improved upon by future students.)

5 Gary Burge, *Christianity Today* (Oct. 6, 1997).

6 I have noted this repeatedly in other places (*New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*, ed. Bradley Nassif (Eerdmans, 1996), p. xiv. The finest comparison of hermeneutical principles has been by Grant Osborne,

'The Many and the One: The Interface between Eastern Orthodox and Protestant Hermeneutics', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* (Vol. 3:1995). Osborne is Professor of NT at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. The publication of this article by St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary in New York is a significant sign of Orthodox interest in the subject. See also scholarly works on biblical criticism by such evangelicals as, among others, F.F. Bruce, Ralph Martin, Grant

Osborne, Murray Harris, I. Howard Marshall, Donald Guthrie, Donald Hagner, Walter Liefeld, Moises Silva, and Bruce Waltke.

7 For a suggestion on how evangelicals should do missionary work among the Orthodox see Bradley Nassif, 'Evangelical Missions in Eastern Orthodox Lands' in *Trinity World Forum* (Winter, 1996) (published by Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL).

The Orthodox Liturgy: ascent to the kingdom

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Keywords: Orthodoxy, faith, worship, Holy Liturgy, creation, prayer, symbols, bishop, Christ, altar, church, icon

The word 'Orthodoxy' means literally 'right glory': thus to be truly Orthodox means giving God the right glory. We can do this in a number of ways, but especially by holding the right faith and offering the right worship. Faith and worship are inextricably linked. Our Christian faith, inasmuch as it can be defined in words, has been handed down to us as part of the Holy Tradition of the church. It is grounded in that Tradition, which is itself the life of the Holy Spirit within the church and which includes Holy Scripture, the Apostolic order, the Creed of Nicea-Constantinople, the consensus of the Fathers, and the seven great Ecumenical Councils. It finds its highest expression in the Church's liturgical worship, and uniquely in the 'Holy Liturgy' — the Eucharist — in which the worshipping church is caught up into the heavenly realm, where its one and only Head, Christ, makes his one complete offering of himself before the throne of the Father.

There are two principal forms of the Holy Liturgy celebrated in Orthodox Churches today: *the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom* (the most frequently used form) and *the Liturgy of St Basil the Great* (used on certain great feasts and on Sundays in Great Lent). These Liturgies derive from earlier forms, and especially *the Liturgy of St James* (used in Jerusalem and Palestine) and *the Liturgy of St Mark* (used in Alexandria and Egypt). There is also *the Liturgy of St Gregory the Dialogist*, usually known as 'the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts', which is essentially Lenten Vespers with Holy Communion from reserved Holy Gifts, and is used primarily on those days of the Great Fast when celebration of the Eucharist

is forbidden. We shall not be concerned with this last liturgical form here, and it will be *the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom* which will be discussed since this is the form most likely to be experienced by occasional visitors to Orthodox Sunday worship.

Before coming to the details of the Liturgy itself, there are some preliminary points which should be made. First, that in celebrating the Holy Liturgy man is most perfectly fulfilling his highest duty as a 'liturgical animal' set over Creation by God in order to offer that Creation back to him in thanksgiving. Secondly, despite the Fall, both time and matter have traditionally been sanctified through appropriate prayer and offering: time by the Offices and Hours of prayer (Ps. 119:164) and matter (including ourselves) by the Eucharist in obedience to Christ's commandment (Lk. 22:19b etc.). Thirdly, Orthodoxy gives a special meaning to symbols: symbols are not mere reminders or substitutes but participate spiritually in whatever is symbolized; as, for example, an icon participates in the person or event represented, thereby made spiritually present. In a similar manner, 'remembrance' is not essentially an act of recalling the past, but makes what is recalled present for us. Fourthly, the Holy Liturgy is both cosmic and eschatological; time and space are transcended; thus in it we 'remember' not only the historic events of man's salvation through Christ's life, death, and resurrection, but also the eschatological event of Christ's Second Coming. Fifthly, the 'proper' visible offerer of the Eucharist is the local bishop, though (for practical reasons) it will more often be celebrated by a single priest acting with