CHRISTIAN WORKER

"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Corinthians 6:1)

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The Question of Authenticity

Rick Brumback

One of the central claims of Eastern Orthodoxy is that it represents original or authentic Christianity, in harmony with the faith taught by Jesus and the apostles. Many groups make such claims, but to evaluate this assertion requires us to identify the continuity, or lack of, with the faith in its nascent stage as described in the Scriptures. Even any claims to legitimate doctrinal developments would need to align with the teachings of the Bible in a way *permitting* such development. For disciples interested in practicing the ancient faith in our own era, this remains a topic of great significance.

Closely linked is the issue of the sources of authority recognized by Eastern Orthodoxy and whether these sources align with Scripture. The church of the first century was called to accept Scripture as the guide for all matters spiritual. So what is considered normative or authoritative for belief, doctrine, and practice in Eastern Orthodoxy?

Both the first-century church and Orthodoxy affirm that the Scriptures are authoritative (though they differ in *how* they are interpreted and regarded as normative), but Orthodoxy claims six more sources: (1) the decrees of the first seven so-called ecumenical councils; (2) the teachings of church fathers and later figures, especially those of the fourth century; (3) the "living voice" of the bishops who are said to be "inspired" by the grace and help of God; (4) church history itself and how heresy was refuted; (5) the prayers of key church figures; and (6) the lives of monks and ascetics as pious examples (Andrew Louth, *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013], 5-6). These last six are collectively referred to as Church Tradition, and for Eastern Orthodoxy the Bible and Church Tradition form the two sources of authoritative teaching and guidance. But is there continuity between them so that Orthodoxy's teaching is original? A few comparisons on major teachings can help answer this question.

Orthodoxy has three clerical ranks: bishops, presbyters/elders, and deacons. Though these are the same terms used

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FROM THE EDITOR:

The Eucharist

Ross Haffner

Family meals are important. Holidays, reunions, and family gatherings often center around food and the traditions associated with it. These meals strengthen family bonds and remind us of our shared history. In a similar way, the Lord's Supper is a special meal instituted by Jesus Christ to unite His followers and remind them of His sacrifice. However, Eastern Orthodox churches and churches of Christ understand and practice this meal differently. By examining the New Testament, we can better understand these differences.

In Eastern Orthodoxy, the Eucharist, also called Holy Communion or the Divine Liturgy, is understood as a genuine participation in the body and blood of Christ. Eastern Orthodoxy teaches that the bread and wine truly become Christ's body and blood, although the manner of this change remains a divine mystery. The term *transubstantiation* is more commonly associated with Roman Catholic theology, though it is sometimes used more broadly when discussing sacramental beliefs.

Churches of Christ, on the other hand, understand the bread and fruit of the vine as memorial symbols of Christ's body and blood. Jesus said, "This is my body" and "This is my blood" when He instituted the Supper (Matt. 26:26-29). Jesus also described Himself as "the door" (John 10:9) and "the true vine" (John 15:1). Such expressions illustrate His use of figurative language. Furthermore, Jesus instructed His disciples to partake "in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). Paul likewise taught that the Supper proclaims the Lord's death until He comes again (1 Cor. 11:23-26). To take a literal view of the "body" and "blood" is unwarranted.

Eastern Orthodoxy commonly uses leavened bread, reflecting their understanding of the risen, living Christ. However, the Bible teaches the use of unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine, following the elements associated with Jesus' institution of the Supper. Jesus ordained the Lord's Supper during Passover, where only unleavened bread would have been allowed (Matt. 26:17-19; Exod. 12:15).

Another important difference concerns the relationship between Communion and the forgiveness of sins. Eastern Orthodoxy understands the Eucharist as a sacrament through which believers participate in the life of Christ and receive spiritual nourishment and grace. It is not simply a repeated crucifixion; Orthodox theology maintains that Christ's sacrifice is unique and that the Eucharist makes believers participants in its saving benefits.

The Bible emphasizes that Jesus offered Himself once for all. Hebrews 10:10-14 teaches that Christ's single offering provides what repeated sacrifices could not accomplish. Consequently, the Lord's Supper is observed as a memorial of that completed sacrifice, not as a fresh sacrifice for sins. Its purpose is to remember what Christ has already done, proclaim His death, and strengthen the faith and fellowship of His people.

Although John 6:53-56 is frequently cited in discussions of Christ's flesh and blood, the surrounding context must be considered. Jesus explains in John 6:63 that His words are spirit and life. This teaching should not be associated with the Lord's Supper because Jesus is offering His flesh figuratively in the present tense. They should listen to His teachings immediately. He is not referring to a future act of worship, otherwise the grammar makes no sense.

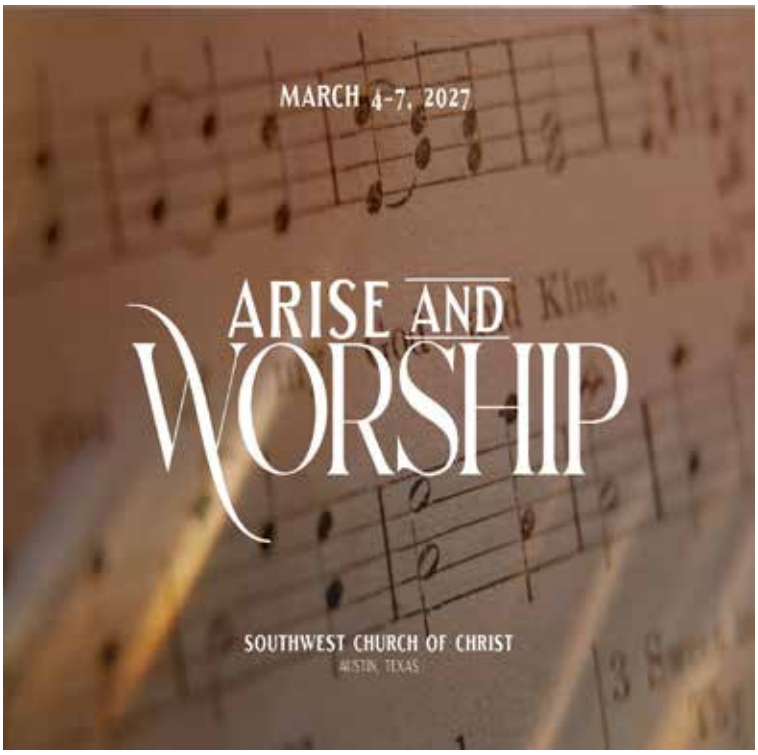
Eastern Orthodox churches administer Communion within the Divine Liturgy, ordinarily on Sundays and other feast days, to baptized Orthodox Christians who are prepared according to their church's discipline.

Christians in the New Testament gathered on the first day of the week "to break bread" (Acts 20:7). 1 Corinthians 11:26 further instructs Christians to proclaim the Lord's death through this practice until He returns and they met each first day to accomplish this (1 Cor 16:1-2). These passages form the basis for the

conviction that the Supper should be observed every Sunday. To add to or take away from that pattern would be a step away from original Christian practice.

Like a family gathering around a table, this meal reminds Christians of who they are and what unites them. The central question is whether our practice reflects the teaching of Scripture. For churches of Christ, the answer is to remember Christ's sacrifice, proclaim His death, examine ourselves, and share in the fellowship of His people each first day of the week. The Supper is not merely an obligation; it is a privilege and a feast of remembrance, gratitude, and unity.

CW



Qualifications of Bishops

Aaron Gallagher

Over the past year, I have engaged in several public discussions concerning whether the Eastern Orthodox Church is the true church established by Jesus Christ. While we share many beliefs in common with Eastern Orthodoxy, we also have disagreements on important doctrinal topics. One of those is the organization and qualifications of church leadership.

The New Testament identifies church leaders using three main terms: *presbyteros* (elder), *episkopos* (bishop/overseer), and *poimēn* (shepherd/pastor). These terms do not describe different offices, but different aspects or functions of the same leadership position.

Consider the three inspired witnesses of Luke, Peter and Paul. In Acts 20:17, Paul summons the *elders* (presbyteroi) of Ephesus. In verse 28, he tells these same men that the Holy Spirit has made them *overseers* (episkopoi) to *shepherd* (poimainein) the church. All three terms describe the same men with differing functions within church leadership. In 1 Peter 5:1-2, Peter instructs the *elders* to *shepherd* God's flock while exercising *oversight*. In Titus 1:5-7, Paul instructs Titus to appoint *elders* in every city, immediately explaining their qualifications by saying, "For a bishop must be blameless." Notice three inspired writers, Luke, Peter, and Paul, identify bishops and presbyters as the same office.

When it comes to the qualifications of this office, Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Timothy 3:1-7 require bishops to be husbands of one wife who properly manage their households and have faithful children. Paul explains that a man's ability to manage his household provides evidence of his qualifications to oversee God's church, asking, "If a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?" (1 Tim. 3:5).

Despite these clear instructions, modern Eastern Orthodoxy requires its bishops to be unmarried or celibate at the time of their appointment, excluding married men from the episcopate. A man who is currently married and faithfully raising his children is excluded from the episcopate, although this is required by Paul. This stands in clear contrast to the qualifications outlined by Paul by the Holy Spirit.

It is also important to mention that this understanding is not unique to churches of Christ. Anglican scholar J. B. Lightfoot wrote, "It is a fact now generally recognized by theologians of all shades of opinion that in the language of the New Testament the same leader in the church is called indifferently 'bishop' ... and 'elder' or 'presbyter.'" (*Philippians*, p. 109). Roman Catholic scholar Raymond Brown also acknowledged that presbyters and bishops in the New Testament were, "for all practical purposes the same" (*Priest and Bishop: Biblical Reflections*, p. 35). The Orthodox Church of America's own instructional manual acknowledges: "At first, the words presbyter/elder (presbyteros) and bishop (episcopos) were used interchangeably…These verses indicate that the words

presbyteros and episcopos described the same office." (*Essential Orthodox Christian Beliefs*, pp. 137–138).

Although the Orthodox manual tries to explain the later separation of these offices as just a change in terminology, it does admit that the New Testament describes bishops and presbyters as the same office.

How do we explain the difference between Scripture and the Eastern Orthodox churches pattern for church leadership? The earliest uninspired Christian writings give us some information here. As we try to trace this development, they mostly reflect the same pattern we see in the New Testament.

Clement of Rome (late first century) speaks of presbyters faithfully fulfilling the duties of the episcopate (*1 Clement* 44). Polycarp (early second century) instructs Christians to submit to their "presbyters and deacons" without mentioning a separate bishop over the presbyters (*Philippians* 5). The Shepherd of Hermas describes "the presbyters who preside over the Church" (*Vision* 2.4). The Didache similarly instructs congregations to appoint for themselves bishops and deacons (15.1).

However, Ignatius of Antioch, writing in the early second century, explicitly distinguishes one bishop from a council of presbyters (*Magnesians* 6). This provides early evidence of what historians call the *mono-episcopate*—a single bishop presiding over the presbyters of a congregation. Nevertheless, even Ignatius's writings present the bishop as the leader of the local Christian community, rather than the later idea of the bishop exercising authority over a large area. Even Ignatius's description doesn't match Eastern Orthodoxy today.

Interestingly, Jerome living in the 4-5th century, gives us some information about this change. In *Epistle* 146, he wrote, "the apostle clearly teaches that presbyters are the same as bishops…when subsequently one presbyter was chosen to preside over the rest, this was done to remedy schism." In his commentary on Titus 1:5, Jerome explained that bishops were placed over presbyters through tradition rather than a particular institution by the Lord. Historian Philip Schaff also recognized that the episcopate developed over time, identifying three stages associated with Ignatius, Irenaeus, and Cyprian (*History of the Christian Church,* vol. 2, p. 144).

The New Testament shows congregations overseen by qualified elders who were also called bishops and pastors. However, we can see from history the emergence of a different hierarchical arrangement. This is interesting considering Paul's warning to the Ephesian elders that men would arise from among themselves, drawing disciples after them (Acts 20:28–31).

The question is not whether Eastern Orthodoxy possesses an ancient ecclesiastical structure. It does. However, something being ancient does not make it apostolic. The question is whether that structure is the one established by the apostles and revealed in the inspired Scriptures. The episcopate of Eastern Orthodoxy today is not the New Testament pattern. It is a post-apostolic development that differs from the pattern revealed in the New Testament.

CW

Infant Baptism

Marco Arroyo

Baptism now saves us. The language of 1 Peter 3:21, though often misinterpreted, could not be clearer about God's teaching on New Testament water baptism. If you want salvation from sin, you must be immersed in water. Our Eastern Orthodox friends agree, only they say we don't go far enough in our defense of baptism. They would argue that baptism is not simply for those who can respond, but for those who cannot. The argument often is posed this way: baptism is necessary for salvation, therefore if you want infants to be saved, you must baptize them. If we put aside the fact that the Eastern Orthodox generally view the eternal fate of unbaptized infants as a matter of optimistic mystery, there are multiple reasons why the case for infant baptism fails.

False Premises: The primary reason for infant baptism in Eastern Orthodoxy is for the remission of Ancestral/Hereditary Sin. This was described in their 1672 Jerusalem Synod as, "man in falling by the [original] transgression to have become comparable and like unto the beasts, that is, to have been utterly undone, and to have fallen from his perfection and impassibility," (Synod of Jerusalem, *Confession of Dositheus*, Decree 14). As is often the case, the support for one false doctrine is another one to maintain logical consistency. In his scholarly work on Baptism in the early church, Everett Ferguson noted that infant baptism originated historically with unfounded concern among anxious Christian families with infants facing an early death, seeking to make every possible preparation for their

entrance into the afterlife. (Everett Ferguson, Baptism in the Early Church, Chapter 23). The Scriptures don't teach an inherited sinful nature from Adam, but actually go out of their way to indicate the opposite (Matt. 18:2-4). Infants lack any cause for separation from God (Isa. 59:1-2), being incapable and therefore not culpable of sin (Deut. 1:39; Isa. 7:15-16).

The New Covenant: Often, a continuity argument is made for infant baptism. Baptism is connected to things like circumcision (Col. 2:11-12) and the Red Sea crossing (1 Cor. 10:1-5), which included infants. Based on this, they ask why God would exclude them from baptism in the New Covenant. Jeremiah 31:31-34 highlights the fact that under the New Covenant, "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," (Jer. 31:34). In the Old, one was born into the covenant, and then learned about their Lord. In the New, one is drawn by the Father by hearing and learning (John 6:44-45), so as to enter the covenant by personal faith (Col. 2:12)! The practice of infant baptism for the New Testament church is fundamentally the structure of the broken covenant by our Israelite fathers, not the better covenant we are in today (Heb. 8:6-13).

The Right Question: With Old and New Testament shadows and comparisons, the New Testament elucidates how things like baptism and circumcision, the flood, or the Red Sea crossing, are similar and different. Therefore, the operative question is: What does the New Testament holistically say about what New Testament baptism is and does? Baptism is necessary for salvation (Mark 16:16), because it is for the remission of personal sins (Acts 2:38), which separate us from God (Isa. 59:1-2). Baptism accompanies belief/faith in response to the Gospel (Acts 16:30-34), where we put on Christ by faith (Gal. 3:26-27). Baptism marks the end of the old life of sin, and the new life in Christ, where the baptized are expected to cease from their former sinful living (Rom. 6:1-7). There is no justification for infant baptism that coheres with the overall biblical purpose of baptism.

Though these Scriptures aren't exhaustive, there is no single baptismal text that necessarily indicates a need to administer it to infants. Being incapable and innocent, infants are held securely in the hands of their Almighty and Benevolent Creator (Matt. 18:2-4), in the hope that in the day when sin arises (Rom. 7:7-12), they may grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us (Acts 17:27).

CW

Icons and Relics

John Garza

One of the strongest appeals of Eastern Orthodoxy is its sense of antiquity. The icons, candles, incense, relics, chanting, and elaborate worship can give the impression that one has stepped directly into ancient Christianity. For those dissatisfied with shallow or casual religion, that sense of reverence can be powerful. Yet the fundamental question is not whether a practice feels ancient, beautiful, or spiritual. The question is whether it is apostolic. Scripture commands us to "test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thess. 5:21).

This is especially important when considering icons and relics. The Eastern Orthodox church distinguish between worship and veneration. They argue that they do not worship an icon but honor the person represented by it, sometimes describing the icon as a "window to heaven." Nevertheless, the New Testament gives no example of Christians using images of Christ, Mary, or departed saints as devotional objects. There is no record of Christians bowing before images, kissing them, burning incense before them, or praying in their presence.

This becomes significant when compared with the biblical warnings concerning religious images. God commanded Israel, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image… you shall not bow down to them nor serve them" (Exod. 20:4-5). The concern is not simply possessing artwork, but attaching religious devotion to an image. From a New Testament perspective, worship is directed toward God "in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24), rather than through physical representations.

History also raises serious questions about the claim that icon veneration came directly from the apostles. Early Christian worship was remarkably simple. Justin Martyr's second-century description of Christian assemblies mentions Scripture reading, exhortation, prayer, the Lord's Supper, and giving— but no devotional use of icons.

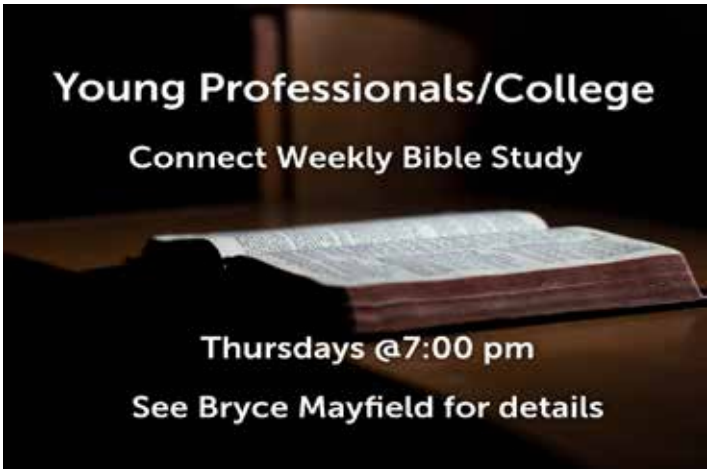
Furthermore, the Council of Elvira, around A.D. 305, prohibited pictures from being placed in churches out of concern that they might become objects of worship or adoration. Iconography became increasingly widespread centuries later and eventually produced intense controversy. The Second Council of Nicaea in A.D. 787 formally defended the veneration of icons— more than seven centuries after the establishment of the church.

Relics followed a similar development. As Christians began honoring martyrs in the second and third centuries, increasing attention was given to their remains and possessions. Eventually, miraculous powers were attributed to certain relics, and shrines developed around the bones or belongings of departed saints. By the fourth and fifth centuries, these practices had become increasingly prominent, although some Christians opposed them.

Acts 19:11-12 is relevant to this discussion because handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched Paul were associated with miraculous healings. But the passage records an extraordinary miracle performed by God through an apostle. Christians did not preserve Paul's handkerchiefs, build shrines around them, bow before them, or establish an ongoing practice of venerating apostolic possessions. A miraculous event is not necessarily an authorized pattern for Christian worship. That distinction matters. The issue is not whether Orthodox Christians are sincere. Nor is the issue whether sacred art can remind someone of Christ or biblical history. The question is authority. Where did Christ or His apostles authorize Christians to venerate images or relics?

If these practices cannot be found in the apostolic church but instead developed gradually in later centuries, then their antiquity does not make them apostolic. The New Testament church drew near to God without icons, relics, or elaborate devotional objects. Christians had Christ, His Word, prayer, fellowship, singing, and the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42). Our goal, therefore, should not be to recover "ancient" Christianity or "medieval" Christianity, but New Testament Christianity. True reverence does not require additions to what God has revealed. The deepest and most ancient faith is found by returning to the teaching delivered through Christ and His apostles—the faith "once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

CW



The Traditions of Men

Bobby Burris

Recently, Eastern Orthodox theology has attracted renewed attention in modern religious discussions. Many people are drawn to a religion like this because of its age, its traditions, and its historical emphasis, yet when examining a religious order like this we must ask: Are religious practices authoritative because they are ancient or because they are authorized by the Word of God? And should tradition establish religious doctrine alongside of Scripture?

The Greek Orthodox Church openly recognizes both the Bible and "Sacred Tradition" as sources of their faith. They openly reject sola scriptura (scripture alone). Their tradition encompasses the writings of church fathers, decisions of the councils, liturgical practices and the veneration of icons and saints. While Orthodox believers view these sources as expressions of an historic Christian faith, we must examine whether such practices are authorized by the New Testament.

Jesus warned against allowing human tradition to supersede divine authority. In Mark 7:7, He condemned those who taught "for doctrines the commandments of men." He continued in verse 9, "Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye many keep your own tradition." Jesus points out that they had elevated human traditions well above God's commandments.

Consider for a moment religious world history, which is littered with historical divisions and denominational schisms. During the seventeenth century, the Russian Orthodox church was confronted by reforms intended to bring them into conformity with the Greek Orthodox church. Those who resisted these changes became known as Old Believers, and this controversy developed into a lasting schism. They were scattered throughout the world and fled Russia in subsequent years. There has never been a reconciliation. This is but one example of religious division though the centuries and how it continues to subdivide those who profess a faith in Christianity. The devil loves to have it so. Therefore, this raises a fundamental question: if traditions can change, and in doing so they conflict and divide practitioners, what business do they serve as the foundation of any religious authority?

Now contrast these traditions that divide people, with the only real thing that can unite and unify people of faith;

God's Holy Word! You see, the New Testament provides the standard by which our faith and practice must be measured. Paul declared in Colossians 3:17, "And whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." Our religious practices must therefore be grounded in Christ's authority, not merely in the customs of those who proceeded the apostles.

Several Orthodox practices, such as, the veneration of icons, intercessory prayers for the departed, and an emphasis in authorized "Sacred Tradition" deserve careful examination. Where does the New Testament authorize these as required elements of Christian practice? Scripture teaches that Christ is our mediator (1 Tim. 2:5) and we worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). We must be careful not to confuse traditions developed over centuries with commands given by Christ and His apostles.

However, the greatest lesson we can learn from this examination of the Orthodox church is to examine our own practices, make the application to our own traditions and customs, and to see them for what they are – secondary to the adherence of God's Word. Every Christian and every congregation must continually ask whether its teachings, worship, and organization reflect the New Testament pattern.

Paul praised the Bereans, because they "searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). Their example reminds us that sincere teachers and respected congregations are not beyond examination. The church belongs to Christ (Matt. 16:18) and He possesses all authority (Matt. 28:18). All scripture is given by inspiration of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Tradition is not given by inspiration, but by men; therefore, we follow the revealed will of God. The ultimate question is not whether a tradition is ancient, beautiful, or meaningful. The better question is whether our practice of faith is adherent to the Word of God.

CW

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for church leadership in the Bible, specific details are very different. For example, Orthodox bishops must be unmarried and unwidowed, in direct contradiction with 1 Timothy 3:2, which says a bishop *must* be married. Additionally, where the New Testament teaches that bishops, presbyters, and elders are terms used synonymously designating the same persons and office, in Orthodoxy the bishop stands above the elders, deacons, and members in a given congregation. This is not original. Instead, this structure owes its rise to Ignatius of Antioch (d. ca. 108-112), who advocated elevating one of the elders in a congregation to a leading role and becoming the "bishop." This leadership of one person in a congregation, called the "monarchical episcopacy," represents a deviation from the Bible's simple structure, and over time, this structure becomes even more complicated. It is impossible to conclude this later development is in harmony with what the apostles and early Christians taught and promoted.

Another point of comparison concerns infants and their spiritual state. Orthodoxy teaches ancestral sin, which is different than original sin. Original sin says that people, including babies, share in the guilt of Adam and Eve. Ancestral sin is different; the person does not share the *guilt,* but he is said to be inherently corrupt because of being born into a depraved world. "[S]omething of the sinful condition in which we find ourselves is inherited from our forefathers and foremothers, who are in some way represented by Adam and Eve. It is not claimed that we are *responsible* for ancestral sin, simply that we are affected by it" (Louth, 78 emphasis in original). The infant is then baptized to remove the corruption.

While the Bible does speak about the world being corrupted through sin (Ps. 51:5; Eph. 2:1-2), nowhere does it teach that each person is depraved due to being born into our world. Otherwise even Jesus would have been depraved! Consequently, the Bible does not teach the baptism of infants—ever. Every time someone is shown responding to the Gospel, they are always persons of sufficient maturity to make the personal decision to become a disciple of Jesus. This is why there is no instance in the Bible of an infant being baptized. This becomes another occasion in which the teachings of Eastern Orthodoxy do not align with the teachings of the Bible and the first-century church.

While other teachings merit similar examination, these examples provide clear evidence of a distinction between the teachings of Orthodoxy and those of the Bible on these doctrines. Continuity of views is simply not there, leading us to recognize that on the whole Eastern Orthodoxy does not represent the authentic faith as presented in the Bible and attested in the beginning days of Christianity.

CW

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From the Director's Desk



Trent Kennedy
Director
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Eastern Orthodoxy has recently attracted a growing number of people in the USA. While some are leaving man-made denominations, there are examples of Christians (even among our own alumni) who have abandoned the once-for-all delivered faith for the so-called Orthodox religion. While those individuals will have their own reasons and will stand accountable to God for those decisions, I do notice a pattern among converts to Eastern Orthodoxy: a displeasure with the casualness of American churches. Eastern Orthodoxy often misplaces man-made reverence for true Biblical reverence (cf. Matt. 23:5; Col. 2:20-23); but the observation that many "churches" in the US are casual or irreverent is not entirely off-base. Worship services are smoke and mirrors, sermons are fluff and puff, and emphasis is placed on image, convenience, and preference. Neither the portrayal of reverence as found in Orthodoxy nor the flippancy of many churches reflects the Biblical pattern for worship, practice, preaching, or life.

What can the church learn from these observations:

1) There are well-intentioned people seeking to reject modern forms of Christianity.

2) There are well-intentioned people seeking to reverently serve the holy God.

3) There are well-intentioned people who are turning to antiquity in their search for truth.

As we see Eastern Orthodoxy grow, let us approach our neighbors with conviction in the Scriptures. Let us approach them with answers to their man-made traditions that rest on various "church Fathers" and unbiblical reasoning. Let us assume that they are well-intentioned in their desire to serve God with reverence and respect. Let us not bring to them modern Christianity or American Christianity or any other watered-down, wayward form of Christianity. Let us approach them with the simplicity of the gospel, the unaltered message of Jesus of Nazareth.