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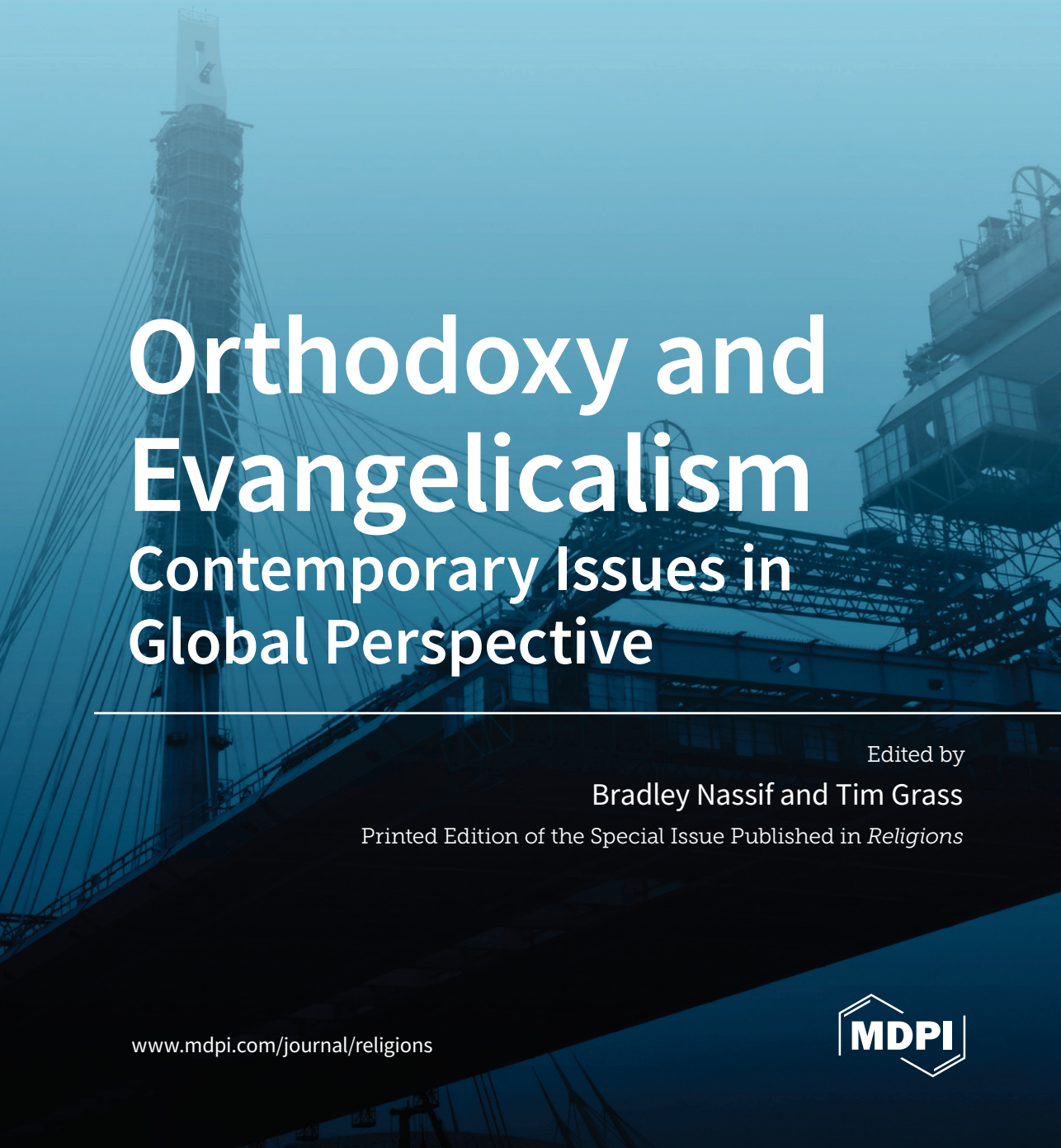

Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism

Contemporary Issues in Global Perspective

Edited by

Bradley Nassif and Tim Grass

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Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism: Contemporary Issues in Global Perspective

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Editors

Bradley Nassif
Tim Grass

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Editors

Bradley Nassif
North Park University
USA

Tim Grass
Facilitator of
Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative
and Senior Research Fellow at
Spurgeon's College
UK

Editorial Office
MDPI
St. Alban-Anlage 66
4052 Basel, Switzerland

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Contents

About the Editors . . . . . **vii**

Preface to "Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism: Contemporary Issues in Global Perspective" . . . **ix**

Sergey Koryakin
Abandoning Penal Substitution: A Patristic Inspiration for Contemporary Protestant Understanding of the Atonement
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2021**, *12*, 785, doi:10.3390/rel12090785 . . . . . **1**

Dănuț Jemna and Dănuț Mănăstireanu
When the Gap between Academic Theology and the Church Makes Possible the Orthodox–Evangelical Dialogue
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2021**, *12*, 274, doi:10.3390/rel12040274 . . . . . **15**

Cristian Sonea
Ecumenical Convergences: Romanian Evangelicals Exploring Orthodoxy
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2021**, *12*, 398, doi:10.3390/rel12060398 . . . . . **27**

George Hancock-Stefan and SaraGrace Stefan
From the Ivory Tower to the Grass Roots: Ending Orthodox Oppression of Evangelicals, and Beginning Grassroots Fellowship
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2021**, *12*, 601, doi:10.3390/rel12080601 . . . . . **43**

Daniel Buda
Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism: An Overview of Their Relationship from the Perspective of Moral Values
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2021**, *12*, 383, doi:10.3390/rel12060383 . . . . . **59**

Alexander Negrov and Alexander Malov
Eco-Theology and Environmental Leadership in Orthodox and Evangelical Perspectives in Russia and Ukraine
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2021**, *12*, 305, doi:10.3390/rel12050305 . . . . . **69**

Ralph Lee
Discipleship in Oriental Orthodox and Evangelical Communities
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2021**, *12*, 320, doi:10.3390/rel12050320 . . . . . **91**

Kristina Whiteman
Together toward Christ: Comparing Orthodox and Wesleyan Positions on Evangelism
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2021**, *12*, 495, doi:10.3390/rel12070495 . . . . . **103**

Mae Elise Cannon and Kevin Vollrath
Spiritual Synchronicity: Icon Veneration in Evangelical and Orthodox Religious Practices in the 21st Century
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2021**, *12*, 463, doi:10.3390/rel12070463 . . . . . **117**

Konstantin S. Divisenko, Alexei E. Belov and Olga V. Divisenko
Spiritual Well-Being of Russian Orthodox and Evangelical Christians: Denominational Features
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2021**, *12*, 392, doi:10.3390/rel12060392 . . . . . **129**

John Binns
Monasticism—Then and Now
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2021**, *12*, 510, doi:10.3390/rel12070510 . . . . . **145**

Edward Rommen
Remnant and the New Dark Age
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2021**, *12*, 372, doi:10.3390/rel12060372 . . . . . **157**

Petro Kovaliv
Rediscovering a Biblical and Early Patristic View of Atonement through Orthodox–Evangelical Dialogue
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2021**, *12*, 543, doi:10.3390/rel12070543 . . . . . **173**

Maxym Lysack
Charismatic Reformer, Mystic or Father? The Reception of Symeon the New Theologian by Pentecostal/Charismatic Theologians
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2021**, *12*, 389, doi:10.3390/rel12060389 . . . . . **189**

Panagiotis Kantartzis
Mariology, Anthropology, Synergy and Grace: Why Is Luther So Far Apart from Cabasilas?
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2021**, *12*, 343, doi:10.3390/rel12050343 . . . . . **203**

Tsung-I Hwang
A Tentative Proposal to Use Orthodox Theological Relational Selfhood as an Alternative for Confucian-Influenced Chinese Evangelicals
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2021**, *12*, 321, doi:10.3390/rel12050321 . . . . . **213**

Geoffrey Ready
Renewing the Narrative of the Age to Come: The Kingdom of God in NT Wright and John Zizioulas
Reprinted from: *Religions* **2021**, *12*, 514, doi:10.3390/rel12070514 . . . . . **225**

About the Editors

Bradley Nassif is Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at North Park University. He is a Lebanese American in the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America and Syria. Fr John Meyendorff was his doctoral mentor. *The New Republic* describes him as "the leading academic expert on Eastern Orthodox and Evangelical dialogue". He has been a longtime contributor to *Christianity Today*, and a pioneer of Orthodox–Evangelical dialogue in the United States, the WCC, and the Lausanne–Orthodox Initiative (www.loimission.net). His newest book is titled, *The Evangelical Theology of the Orthodox Church*, foreword by Andrew Louth (St. Vladimir's Press). Brad has been a Visiting Professor at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Seminary, the Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute, and a Director of Academic Programs at Fuller Seminary. He team-taught a course at Regent College with Dr. J.I. Packer titled, "Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism in Dialogue".

Tim Grass is a historian of modern Christianity, specializing in Evangelical movements; he undertook doctoral studies in ecclesiology under Prof. Colin Gunton at Kings College London. Tim is a Senior Research Fellow at Spurgeon's College, London, where he has taught various courses in history. He has also taught Reformation theology in Baptist institutions in Romania and Russia. Among his books are *Gathering to His Name: A History of Open Brethren in Britain and Ireland* (2006, 2013), *SCM Core Text: Modern Church History* (2008), *F. F. Bruce: A Life* (2011), and *The Lord's Work: A History of the Catholic Apostolic Church* (2016). Tim has almost 25 years' experience in Orthodox–Evangelical dialogue in the UK and internationally, and has co-edited several books on this, including *Building Bridges* (WCC, 2012), *The Mission of God* (Regnum, 2015), and *Living the Gospel of Jesus Christ* (Regnum, 2021). Since 2016, he has served the Lausanne–Orthodox Initiative as its facilitator. He lives on the Isle of Man.

Preface to "Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism: Contemporary Issues in Global Perspective"

Since the 1990s, the Eastern Orthodox and Protestant Evangelical communities have had more direct contact with each other than at any other time. This book focuses on current developments and issues in specific regions of the world.

With the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, Western Evangelical missionaries began flooding the former Soviet Union, Romania, and other Eastern Bloc countries, often without consulting the local Evangelical communities. Partly in response to this wave of missions, a new paradigm of ecumenical relations emerged among professional theologians in North America when the *Society for the Study of Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism* (SSEOE) was formed in 1990. It focused on comparative theology, spirituality, and missions. In 1993, the World Council of Churches (WCC) opened international dialogues between the Orthodox and Evangelical communities, fueled by concerns regarding Evangelical proselytism in Russia and Eastern Europe but also shared concerns regarding perceived theological trends within the WCC itself. Publications included *Proclaiming Christ Today: Orthodox–Evangelical Consultation* (1995) and *Turn to God, Rejoice in Hope* (1998). From 2000 to 2006, a series of seminars at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, resulted in the publication of *Building Bridges: Between the Orthodox and Evangelical Traditions* (2012). In the UK, the Evangelical Alliance initiated a dialogue process that resulted in *Evangelicalism and the Orthodox Church* (2001), which aimed to lay a foundation for mutual understanding by comparing and contrasting Orthodox and Evangelical beliefs and practices. Since then, the main ongoing exchange between Orthodox and Evangelical communities has been that initiated in 2010 by leaders within the Lausanne Movement and the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox churches, which resulted in the formation of the Lausanne–Orthodox Initiative. Unlike other dialogues, this focuses on exploring how the two traditions can cooperate in the mission of God. A number of papers from its gatherings appear in *The Mission of God: Studies in Orthodox and Evangelical Mission* (2015) and *Living the Gospel of Jesus Christ* (2021).

However, in spite of all the work that has been conducted, there remains scope for further scholarly investigation; for example, few regional studies have examined areas outside the Anglophone world, or the political and legal aspects of relationships between these traditions. Current environmental and moral concerns present new challenges but also new opportunities to learn from one another. Hence, the purpose of this volume.

This volume presents a collection of scholarly essays on current issues and developments in Orthodox–Evangelical relations, at both global and national levels, which will inform the ongoing dialogue. The essays evaluate regional meetings, discuss the history of relationships, address current missiological challenges, political and legal issues, comparative theology, and related topics. They range through Russia, Eastern and Western Europe, the Middle East, Africa, North America, Australia, and Greece. A particular strength of the volume is the number of contributions from Eastern European writers. Nuances of difference are recognized here between Eastern and Western Evangelicals, and between Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox communities.

We wish to thank the editors of the Religions journal for their invitation to edit this collection of essays. Their support and editorial efficiency have made our work much easier. Finally, we were delighted at the level of interest in contributing to this volume, and we thank the authors for their patience with the editorial process. Such a degree of interest bodes well for the future development of relationships between these two Christian traditions.

Bradley Nassif, Tim Grass
Editors

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Article

Abandoning Penal Substitution: A Patristic Inspiration for Contemporary Protestant Understanding of the Atonement

Sergey Koryakin

Department of Christian Ministry and Theology, Moscow Evangelical Christian Seminary, 129327 Moscow, Russia; sergeykoryakin@gmail.com

Abstract: In recent decades, there has been a resurgent interest among Protestant theologians in the so-called Christus Victor theory of the atonement. Firmly grounded in patristic thought (esp. Irenaeus of Lyons), this understanding of the work of Christ was first studied and formulated by a Swedish Lutheran, Gustaf Aulén, in 1931. Recent works by Darby Kathleen Ray, J. Denny Weaver, Thomas Finger, Gregory Boyd, and others develop Aulén's endeavor and present new versions of the Christus Victor model. These scholars directly or indirectly demonstrate that the main framework of the patristic understanding of atonement was more faithful to Scripture and less problematic in terms of dogma and ethics than the traditional Protestant penal substitution theory. A short analysis of contemporary versions of the Christus Victor motif shows that this model of atonement proves to be more relevant in responding to the challenges of today's world by providing substantial background for Christian spiritual life and ethics.

Keywords: atonement; the work of Christ; retributive justice; penal substitution; satisfaction; nonviolence; Christus Victor; Gustaf Aulén; Anselm; Irenaeus; Darby Kathleen Ray; J. Denny Weaver; Thomas Finger; Gregory Boyd

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Recent decades have shown a resurgent interest in the doctrine of atonement among Protestant theologians. The growing number of conferences and books dedicated to the issue demonstrates an attempt by some authors either to reconsider the centrality of the penal substitution model for a Protestant understanding of the Gospel, or to totally disqualify it by showing the lack of substantial biblical grounding for it. In every century since the Reformation one might easily trace that there were opponents to what we may call the traditional Protestant theory of atonement. The last half of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century were marked by an unprecedented number of scholarly attempts to provide alternative interpretations of the work of Jesus Christ. As an alternative to penal substitution, with its accent on the objective side of atonement, the works of Campbell (1856); Bushnell (1866); Ritschl (1872); Moberly (1901); Rashdall (1919) and others tended to emphasize the subjective aspect, thus resuscitating and reinterpreting well known Abelardian views. However, a really new, Copernican approach to the topic was a small book by a Swedish theologian Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor*, published in 1931, in which he showed the importance of the patristic interpretation of the atonement "as a Divine conflict and victory; Christ—Christus Victor—fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the 'tyrants' under which mankind is in bondage and suffering, and in Him God reconciles the world to Himself" (Aulén 2003, p. 4). This work opened new horizons for contemporary interpreters of the doctrine of the atonement.

This article will attempt to demonstrate basic conceptual differences between the penal substitution and Christus Victor models of the atonement. Without going into details of polemics between the adherents of both views, we will focus on a new tendency among Protestant theologians to appropriate the patristic Christus Victor motif and the overall advantages it brings for Christian doctrine and ethics.

1. The Basic Shapes of the Two Approaches to the Atonement

For an Eastern Orthodox believer, Aulén's approach to the atonement may not seem radically new, because it is akin to the Russian saying, "All that is new is but well-forgotten old". For Western theologians, however, the Christus Victor concept was nothing less than a shift of paradigm. It is well known that the traditional Protestant interpretation of the Cross was ultimately influenced by the ideas of Anselm of Canterbury's *Cur Deus homo*.[1] Relatively new to its own time and to the preceding Catholic tradition, this understanding of the person and work of Christ quickly gained popularity among the school theologians and became a basic framework for the Reformers' doctrine of the atonement. One may easily notice the difference of paradigms between the concept espoused by Anselm and the Reformers on one side and by Eastern Fathers on the other.

1.1. From the Anselmian Satisfaction to Penal Substitution

The feudal setting of late medieval Europe provided Anselm of Canterbury with the language and concepts for explaining the doctrine of the atonement to his contemporaries. According to the logic of *Cur Deus homo*, God is the Sovereign whose honor was offended by his vassals, Adam and Eve. Once they sinned, they failed to render uprightness of the will to God, which was the only and complete debt of honor owed to Him. They failed to conquer the devil by their obedience, yielded to his temptations and subjected themselves to his will, contrary to the will and honor of God (Anselm 1903, I. 22). Finally, Adam and Eve trampled God's plan with regard to the future of humankind, since all human nature was corrupted through their fall (I.23).

The measure of the injury turned out to be enormous; the first humans had to restore what was taken away from God, but they also had to make certain "compensation for the anguish incurred", which is a satisfaction that is "something which could not have been demanded" of them (I.11). Certainly, there is no chance for humans to restore the way things were or to offer compensation, since they possess nothing that had not been given to them by God. At the same time, for God "it is not right to cancel the sin without compensation or punishment" by compassion alone; otherwise there will be no difference between the guilty and the not guilty, thus showing Him unjust (I.12). It is necessary, therefore, that either satisfaction or punishment followed every sin (*necesse est ut omne peccatum satisfactio aut poena sequatur*) (I.15).

The situation seems irresolvable: a man who ought to make satisfaction to God is unable to do so; God, the only one capable of making satisfaction, ought not to do so. Therefore, "it is necessary for the God-man to make it" (II.6). Only the God-man Jesus Christ, by way of satisfaction, is able to offer something "not of debt" (*nec ex debito*), that is, lay down His life. "For God will not demand this of him as a debt; for, as no sin will be found, he ought not to die" (II.11). Thus, Jesus Christ deliberately and obediently dies instead of humans in order to defeat the devil, make satisfaction to God, restore His honor and provide means for the restoration of God's plan with regard to humanity. In order to reward the Son, the Father applies the merits of His saving work to believers through the sacraments of the Church (II.20).

Notably, the devil plays no significant role in Anselm's doctrine of the atonement. Since "neither the devil nor man belong to any but God, and neither can exist without the exertion of Divine power", there cannot be any controversy between God and the devil. If the devil torments man, it does not imply that he has any power over man, but does so because "God in justice permits this" (I.17).

Anselm's interpretation of the atonement had a big impact on Western theology. While theologians before him had tried to use various biblical metaphors and concepts to describe the work of Christ, after *Cur Deus homo* many aspired to produce a unified and coherent theory. Undoubtedly, Anselm's concept became "the theme on which most later explanations of the redemption are variations" (Burns 1975, p. 289; see also: Pelikan 1985, p. 23) with no exception for the Reformers, whose doctrine of the atonement is "clearly Anselmic with the advance of clarification and refinement" (Hannah 1978, p. 343)[2].

For Martin Luther and John Calvin the concept of retribution still served as the main leading gear of the doctrine, presenting God as insulted by human sin and the necessity for man to make up for it by offering satisfaction. The vector of the redemption, so to speak, was aimed at overcoming estrangement between God and man without implying any real opposition between God and the devil[3]. However, one may notice slight changes in reasoning more aligned with the later developments of Anselm's thought, found in Thomas Aquinas. If the logic of *Cur Deus homo* requires satisfaction *or* punishment, the Reformers saw the dilemma of sin being solved by satisfaction *through* punishment. Unlike Anselm, Luther and Calvin saw the nature of the atonement not in satisfying God's honor, but in resolving opposition between God's justice and human sin.

According to Luther, "God's justice is God Himself" (Luther 1888, WA 6, s. 127), or as Calvin puts it, "God is a just judge" (Calvin 1960, II. 16.1), who cannot allow His law to be violated. Therefore, until satisfaction is offered, sinners remain under God's wrath; they do not deserve His pardon and remain enslaved by the power of sin and the devil. God uses the law and the devil as His instruments in order to induce man to repentance. God's enemy holds legal power over men; he is their accuser while they are in debt to God's justice. In order to save humankind from this predicament, God's Son, Jesus Christ fulfills the demands of the law and bears its curses by taking human sins upon Himself. On the Cross, God's wrath is poured upon Jesus who is made the greatest of all sinners (*summus peccator*) on behalf of all men (Luther 1892, WA 5. s. 602–3). God the Father punishes His Son in order to demonstrate His justice with regard to sin. Now God's wrath is placated, His benevolence towards men is restored, and He is ready to offer forgiveness and justify anyone who believes in Jesus Christ (Calvin 1960, II. 17.1, 5). The fruits of redemption are further applied through a "wonderful exchange" (Luther 1892, WA 5, s. 608) or "mystical union" (Calvin 1960, III. 11.10), in which man puts on Christ and is being made one with Him through faith.

These are, in a nutshell, the background and the basic tenets of penal substitution theory, which may be called the traditional understanding of the atonement within orthodox Protestantism. No wonder Aulén called it the 'Latin' doctrine, as opposed to 'the classic idea' of the atonement which he grounded in the New Testament texts and the thought of the early Church Fathers.

1.2. The "Classic Idea" of the Atonement

According to Aulén, medieval scholastic theology, starting with Anselm, led the Western doctrine of the atonement away from what the Church tradition held for the first millennium. Indeed, it seems more natural to see the Gospels as the story in which God in Christ opposes and conquers the evil powers, thus reconciling the world to Himself, rather than the story of the Divine Son offering satisfaction to the Father's justice.

Aulén masterfully demonstrates the consistency between the narratives of the Evangelists and other New Testament authors as witnessing that the Cross of Christ was decisively God's victory, which sets sinners free from the bondage to sin, death, and the devil. Further, by thoroughly analyzing the thought of Irenaeus of Lyons, who gave the first systematic account of the atonement, the Swedish theologian bridges the span between the New Testament accounts and the later patristic thought on redemption.

According to Irenaeus, God's Son came down from heaven in order to "kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man" so that human beings could "attain to incorruptibility and immortality" (Irenaeus 1885, III. 18.7, 19.1). Having been deceived by the devil, man subjected himself under his power and could not reclaim eternal life for himself. By taking on human flesh, the Word of God who is God Himself (II.13.8), redeemed men by persuasion, not by violence, which is respecting the freedom of human choice and the rights of the devil. He did it not by "snatching away by stratagem the property of another, but taking possession of His own in a righteous (*iuste*) and gracious manner" (V.2.1). First, through His teaching and life, He made humans "imitators of His works as well as doers of His words" in order to undo the works of the devil who had "alienated us contrary to

nature, rendering us its own disciples". Secondly, He "has redeemed us through His own blood, giving His soul for our souls, and His flesh for our flesh, and has also poured out the Spirit of the Father for the union and communion of God, imparting indeed God to men by means of the Spirit" (V.1.1).

A few things are notable in this sketch of Irenaeus' understanding of the atonement. First, he sees the purpose of the incarnation in the liberation of men from bondage to evil powers and thus gives men the possibility of attaining incorruption and immortality. This is a striking difference from the views of Anselm and the Reformers, for whom God's Son takes on flesh in order to die, thus satisfying God's honor/justice, clearing man's status before God and re-enacting His salvific plan for the whole of humanity or/and every believer.

Secondly, it seems that Irenaeus operates with a different concept of justice. For Anselm and the Reformers justice is retributive, demanding satisfaction or punishment for sin; for the bishop of Lyons God's justice is restorative, displayed when He acts not violently and coercively, but by taking into account free choice and the will of His creatures.

Thirdly, Irenaeus is far from associating the work of redemption solely with the death of God's Son; he speaks of the death of Christ as fact, without attempting to show how exactly it redeemed men. He focuses on the redeeming value of the earthly ministry of Christ whose mission was not only to gather in Himself (recapitulating) the experience of human life by "sanctifying every age" (III.22.4), but through His humanity to "deprive apostasy of power" (V.24.4) and thus conquer the devil. For Anselm, however, the earthly ministry of Christ seems to be auxiliary, though the God-Man edifies humans through the example of how one "should not depart from righteousness on account of injustices" (Anselm 1903, II. 11). More valuable, however, is His obedience to the Father which led Him to the Cross (ibid., I.8–9). We find the same tendency in Luther and Calvin: though they speak about the importance of Christ's ministry and obedience to God, the way of salvation is ascribed "as peculiar and proper to Christ's death" (Calvin 1960, II.16.5).

Finally, Irenaeus' doctrine emphasizes the role of Christ's resurrection and ascension for the atonement. Being raised up from the dead, God's Son manifested His victory over the powers of evil, death, and corruption, and became the "first-fruits of the resurrection" of all humankind. Ascending on high, Jesus Christ "offered and commended to the Father that human nature which had been found" (Irenaeus 1885, III.19.3) and poured out the Spirit of the Father "for the union and communion of God and man" (V.1.1). It is noteworthy that the bishop of Lyons links the life of Christians with the work of Christ whose passion "gave rise to strength and power" in believers and "conferred on those that believe in Him the power 'to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and on all the power of the enemy'" (II.20.3). Seeing Irenaeus' brevity in describing the death of Christ and his eloquence when he talks about the fruits of Jesus' resurrection, one can easily conclude that in his thought the atonement is more about life-giving, rather than sin-bearing, as was the case with Anselm and the Reformers[4].

Though the latter Fathers may have been using various ideas and metaphors to describe the salvific work of Christ, they mostly stayed within the framework of Irenaeus' concept of the redemption. As Aulén aptly put it, "there are not different theories of the Atonement in the Fathers, but only variant expressions of one and the same basic idea" (Aulén 2003, p. 37). The whole of the patristic thought on the atonement is based on the idea that it is God who seeks to reconcile rebellious men with Himself through the incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of His Son. The problem is not with God's offended honor nor justice, but with men who need redemption from the power of sin, death, and the devil. Another important aspect of this idea is that, according to the Church Fathers, God's justice is demonstrated not when He demands punishment and/or satisfaction, but when He acts nonviolently with respect to the will and rights of the apostate humans and the devil. The just God in Christ prefers to hand Himself over to the devil, thus snatching sinful humans from his dominion, rather than demanding the death of His innocent Son in order to return balance to His infringed justice.

2. Contemporary Debate on the Atonement

Ultimately, Aulén was right that "each and every interpretation of the atonement is most closely connected with some conception of the essential meaning of Christianity, and reflects some conception of the Divine nature" (ibid., pp. 12–13). As he demonstrated in his study, the traditional Protestant penal substitution theory of the atonement, by developing the ideas of Anselm, displayed a somewhat different view of God and His work, thus causing theological unrest in the minds of its opponents ever since the days of Reformation.

Some critics of the penal substitution theory have pointed at the new developments in biblical studies and argued that the proponents of this doctrine continue to interpret the work of Christ through the lens of the Reformers' concepts[5], despite the evolution of Christian thought. Others have appealed to studies of metaphorical language used to describe the meaning of the Cross. On the one hand, the fact that the New Testament authors employed metaphors does not give much room for a literal reading of the atonement imagery; on the other, the variety of the images shows that the legal metaphors should not be treated as central to the biblical understanding of redemption[6]. Some scholars have highlighted the implicit doctrinal problems in this traditional Protestant understanding of the atonement, while others questioned whether the penal substitution theory provides a good foundation for Christian ethics.

The size of the present work does not allow us to focus on technical issues of the doctrine, such as biblical concepts and metaphors. We will discuss, however, some doctrinal and ethical corollary of the penal substitution theory, which more often fall under the fire of its opponents and which, as we will see, are deeply connected.

2.1. Penal Substitution and Doctrinal Difficulties

As has been pointed out, the Protestant penal substitution theory, following Anselm's logic, does not envision any real controversy between God and the devil. The latter holds man in his power as much as God allows him to do it. Thus the vector of human redemption is not directed at conquering the devil and liberating men from his power, but at satisfying God's justice. Consequently, the problem of estrangement between God and human beings lies within God Himself who cannot forgive His creatures before His Son will be punished and offer satisfaction instead of them.

Many critics of the theory naturally raise the question of whether this understanding brings division within the Trinity, by separating the Son from the Father and juxtaposing their properties and ministry[7]. One punishes, while the Other is being punished; One in His holiness and justice demands satisfaction for sin, while the Other in humility and obedience offers this satisfaction; One is showing His divine wrath, while the Other His divine mercy. Thus, the doctrine of penal substitution makes it very difficult to reconcile the character of God the Father with the character of God the Son who manifested unconditional forgiveness, nonviolence and mercy throughout His earthly ministry. If the Son indeed is of one nature with the Father, as the dogma of the Trinity implies, they both should demonstrate a unity of will and action[8].

Yet another aspect of the theory vulnerable to criticism is its emphasis on the death of Christ at the cost of downplaying the other redemptive aspects of His ministry. As Peter Schmiechen notes, Jesus' announcement of the coming Kingdom, His moral teachings, healings, and resuscitations are considered not as important as His death on the Cross (Schmiechen 2005, p. 113). At the same time His righteous, obedient life bears significance only in as much as it renders Him a blameless sacrifice to the Father and later is imputed to those who will have believed in Him (Calvin 1960, II.16.10; Jeffery et al. 2007, p. 213).

The same is true with regard to Christ's resurrection, which does not fully integrate with the logic of the penal substitution theory and seems to play the role of an addendum to the main theme, "just an epilogue or footnote to the drama of salvation" (Belousek 2011, p. 110). Within the theory, resurrection serves as a proof that satisfaction to the Father has been offered, sin conquered, condemnation cancelled, humans forgiven, Jesus vindicated as the Son of God, the deposit of eternal life made, and assurance of the future resurrection

given[9]. It appears that all these statements either interpret what happened at the death of Jesus on the Cross or promise the future transformation of man on the basis of his faith in Christ. It is not clear, however, what role is assigned to the resurrection of God's Son in the divine victory over sin, death, and the devil, which are traditionally considered as the main fruits of His redemption of man. Certainly, the resurrection is not seen here as an organic part of contemporary accounts of the penal substitution doctrine.[10]

In fact, this tacitly shows that the problem of sin in the penal substitution theory is somewhat underestimated. Human predicament is seen as predominantly a moral problem, a debt or guilt which may be overcome through punishment of God's Son. Man's status before God can be cleared when he "grasps the righteousness of Christ through faith, and clothed in it, appears in God's sight not as sinner but as a righteous man" (Calvin 1960, III. 11.2). Though this new life of justification implies the believer's communion with the resurrected Christ, the narrative of the penal substitution doctrine, at least in its many contemporary presentations, does not make such a connection. Partaking in the power of resurrection is not perceived as part of liberation from an objective evil force corrupting man's nature and alienating him from God, rather it is viewed as a source of moral life according to God's rules.

These doctrinal concerns may seem too distant from Christian ethics. However, it is assumed that a believer's moral life should be deeply grounded in an understanding of God's nature, and imitate His character and His acts. Thus we may question, if we do not see unity in the will and acts of the persons of the Trinity, whom should we imitate: the God Father in His holy justice and judgment or the Son in His mercy and forgiveness? Further, if the resurrection of God's Son plays no integral part in the atonement, what conclusion shall we make about the nature and source of our spiritual life and our participation in God's mission for the world? Finally, if the logic of the penal substitution theory submits all aspects of Christ's earthly redemptive ministry to His death on the Cross, what positive ethical implications can we make from the call to imitate Jesus?

The significance of these questions will become more evident as we further evaluate some ethical corollary of the penal substitution theory.

2.2. Penal Substitution and Christian Ethics

According to the theory, God's Son becomes a substitute sacrifice, who bears human sins upon Himself and is punished by God the Father instead of sinful men. On account of Jesus' satisfaction on the Cross, sinners obtain imputation of God's righteousness by faith. The Cross becomes the place of transaction and, according to T. Scott Daniels, "if this is the case, then the call for disciples to take up their cross, in the same manner in which Jesus has taken up his, is extremely convoluted" (Daniels 2006, p. 127). In such a case, the followers of Christ cannot imitate their Teacher because His death on the Cross has already appeased the wrath of God and satisfied justice. Thus, faith in the Gospel becomes "a cognitive assent" to a once completed atoning work of Christ that moves a Christian away from "radical redemptive participation in the world" (ibid., p. 129). As J. Denny Weaver rightfully adds: atonement theories driven by the idea of satisfaction tend to structure "the relationship between humankind and God in terms of ahistorical, abstract legal formula". Among all aspects of the Savior's earthly ministry, the work of the atonement is centered around His death, which brings satisfaction to God's justice but "contains nothing that would change injustice in the social order". Human redemption brings a new status to man and sets his destiny beyond earthly existence, but speaks little of his spiritual transformation and engagement in this life. Such understanding of the atonement is *a-ethical* in its nature (Weaver 2006, p. 9).

The concept of retributive justice underlying the penal understanding of the atonement implies that the idea of retribution is foundational for God's very nature and thus must guide human ethics in social and political life. If God delivers His Son to a violent death in order to satisfy His justice, it seems natural that, guided by the same idea of justice, human society would approve the death penalty or just war[11]. If God is the God of justice,

He commends the use of force with regard to sinners, criminals, enemies, people of other faiths, etc. Moreover, as some feminist critics have pointed out, in this kind of society violence and victimization can be taken for granted, because the example of Christ teaches people to silently bear violence for the greater good (Brown and Parker 1989, pp. 27–28).

In addition, the retributive view of justice poses a difficulty for our understanding of divine and human forgiveness. If God cannot forgive without punishing His innocent Son, it calls into question the whole concept of forgiveness as we know it. Firstly, forgiveness by definition is free and does not require preliminary satisfaction or punishment. Christians are called to forgive one another as God in Christ forgave them (Eph 4:32), but if they decide to forgive freely, they would act contrary to God's forgiveness as it is understood in the penal substitution theory. Secondly, forgiveness does not presume participation of the third party. Forgiveness is always about resolving the problem between the offended and the offender, and it does not imply a transfer of guilt on the innocent[12]. Otherwise, forgiveness becomes impersonal, the offender does not deal with the consequences of his sin and is not compelled to repent.

When we begin to unpack the logic of the penal substitution doctrine and apply it to the ethical sphere, it becomes apparent that this understanding of the atonement does not connect well with some practical social and moral issues and raises more questions than it answers. Christian practice is deeply rooted in the doctrinal interpretation of God's nature and His works, and if the latter is guided by the concept of retributive justice, it disconnects Christ's ministry from the lives of His followers, makes it possible to justify violence or misrepresent the character of God and the nature of His forgiveness.

3. The Christus Victor Motif in Contemporary Protestant Theology

In recent discussions of the atonement, Aulén's *Christus Victor* study has become a constant point of reference for many Protestant scholars who seek new approaches to the doctrine of the atonement, ones that would be biblically warranted, doctrinally and ethically consistent, and relevant for the challenges of contemporary life. The 'Classic idea' of the atonement, as presented by Aulén in his study, has become for some scholars an impetus for creative appropriations of the patristic legacy.

3.1. Darby Kathleen Ray and the 'Patristic Model' of Christus Victor

At the beginning of her study, *Deceiving the Devil*, Ray rightfully notes that the two previously dominant approaches to the atonement—the objective (penal) and subjective (exemplary)—do not appeal to their feminist and liberationist detractors. The former consider the penal substitutionary view as encouraging violence and abuse, the latter accuse the moral influence view of ethical passivity in the face of injustice and oppression.

Ray proposes her answer by promoting the 'patristic model' of the atonement. In her study, she heavily relies on Aulén's analysis and tries to find a consonance of the patristic ideas with the contemporary problems of evil and violence. Following the Fathers' thought, Ray recognizes the reality and power of evil in human life and its "unjust or avaricious use of power". Through Christ, God not only revealed the true nature of evil and delegitimized its nature, but also opened new possibilities for human beings (Ray 1998, p. 123). The ideas of ransom and deception of the devil seem to captivate Ray's attention. The former exposes the violence and greed of evil, the latter shows God's wisdom in using evil's power against itself (pp. 124–25).

Ray, however, considers the patristic accounts of the atonement as mythologized and thus not much connected with real life. According to her "demythologized" version, Christ opposes not personal evil power, but "the sum total of evil", which includes not only individual sin, but all kinds of interpersonal, communal, institutional and global evil (p. 130). Salvation does not mean as much as "abolition of evil itself but a transformation in one's relationship to evil" (p. 132).

This interpretation unveils a major weakness in Ray's model. If an atonement theory depersonalizes the devil and denies the objective power of evil, it downplays the serious-

ness of the human predicament and equates salvation with moral perfection. For Ray, liberation from bondage is a trope but not an objective divine action; a person obtains freedom not from real bondage to evil powers, but when his/her being and actions cease to be determined by evil and the person gets the ability to reduce the evil around them. Strangely enough, this part of Ray's Christus Victor theory becomes more akin to the Abelardian moral exemplary model and can be criticized on the same grounds.

Despite this doctrinal inconsistency, Ray's atonement theory offers a very practical interpretation for Christian ethics. It presents redemption as a "profoundly this-worldly affair" (ibid.), implying radical resistance to all kinds of violence and injustice, and transformation of human society by the acts of mercy, love, and civil disobedience.

3.2. J. Denny Weaver and 'the Narrative Christus Victor'

Coming from an Anabaptist-Mennonite background, J.D. Weaver naturally proposes a nonviolent paradigm for interpretation of the atonement. After a series of articles published in the 1990s, he published a monograph, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, in 2001 in which he fully developed his atonement theory.

As Weaver points out, his 'Narrative Christus Victor' model has much in common with Ray's "demythologized" patristic view. Weaver, however, tries to ground his theory in "the narratives of the Gospels and Revelation rather than second- and third-century statements" (Weaver 2011, p. 282). The book of Revelation depicts God's community living in, but not of, this world and a "conflict and victory of the reign of God over the rule of Satan" (p. 27). The narrative of the Gospels portrays the same cosmic confrontation from an earthly perspective, in the ministry of God's Son. Jesus announced the coming Kingdom of God, healed the sick, expelled the demons, taught His followers not to retaliate to evil with more evil, and to love their enemies. All that Jesus said and did posed a threat to the devil's rule (in all its manifestations), so God's enemy tried to eliminate Him by the hands of men on the Cross. However, Jesus' resurrection revealed the reign of God and conquered the devil.

Weaver's understanding of the nature of evil implies that the devil is not a personified being, but "the accumulation of earthly structures which are not ruled by the reign of God (p. 307). He treats evil not as a supernatural ontological power which subjects human beings, but as some human collective moral defect which can be battled by "resisting evil and making the rule of God visible" (p. 312). Thus Weaver's concept describes "*salvation* and *discipleship*, not *atonement* at all" (Finlan 2007, p. 99), and it seems to downplay the question of man's redemption to a matter of personal spiritual growth and correcting the morals of this world.

From another point of view, Weaver's Christus Victor version brings many advantages for Christian doctrine as well as for ethics. It shows that the atonement is not an abstract transactional idea but God's action through Christ within history. Arguing for the nonviolent character of the atonement, Weaver underscores that this is not passive but "assertive and confrontational nonviolence that provides an opponent with an opportunity for transformation" (Weaver 2011, p. 37). This, undoubtedly, shows the strong ethical appeal of this idea of the atonement.

3.3. Thomas Finger: Christus Victor as Nonviolent Atonement

Belonging to the same Protestant tradition as Weaver, Thomas Finger for a long time argued that the Christus Victor view of the atonement is the most accurate representation of biblical teaching (Finger 1985, vol. 2, p. 348), and is consonant with the traditional Anabaptist understanding of redemption (Finger 2004, pp. 349–50).

In his exposition, Finger fully relies on Irenaeus' ideas. The devil tricked the first humans and snatched them from God, thus employing "the violent means". On the one hand, humans have become victims of sin; on the other, they are responsible for their choice. Sin itself is a "suprahuman, quasi-personal power" which snatches away from God, subjects them to its own rule, and leads them toward death (Finger 2006, pp. 92–93).

God allows humans to bear the consequences of their sin, thus judging the sin indirectly and nonviolently "by handing people over to the lords they choose" (p. 94). Yet, the evil forces that punish people this way are at the same time God's enemies whom God works to destroy.

Finger considers all aspects of Christ's ministry important for his atoning work. Jesus recapitulates humanity and "walks the path God originally set before Adam and Eve" (p. 95). He obeys God's commandments, resists the forces of evil, and is defeated by them. He brings atonement "by servanthood and the way of peace" (p. 97). On the Cross, Jesus bears human wrath *directly* but suffers the judgment upon sin *indirectly*, as He is taking upon Himself its deadly consequences. The Father and the Son do not act by force but choose nonviolent means to redeem people. God does not inflict punishment on Jesus but allows Him to be afflicted by it (pp. 98–101). Jesus' resurrection (1) reveals the falsehood of political and religious powers who claimed to be the true guarantors of peace, yet crucified the Prince of Peace and God's Messiah; (2) tricks the devil who overstepped his rights by killing the innocent Christ;[13] (3) gives new life in the Spirit, who destroys the operations of evil forces in human lives and fills their hearts with divine love (pp. 102–3).

Finger's Christus Victor model can be viewed as a creative and contemporary interpretation and implementation of Irenaeus' ideas. Though at times, when using the concepts of direct or indirect punishment, Finger seems to pay debt to the penal view, yet there is no impression that his reasoning is disconnected from the New Testament narratives or patristic thought. While focused on the mechanics of the atonement, Finger's model does not leave aside the practical implication of Christ's work. It shows that the atonement pertains not only to personal and spiritual salvation, but it contributes to the unity of people, teaching them to perceive violence as "central and related to all forms of sin" (p. 106) and courageously respond to it nonviolently in self-giving love. By doing this, believers and churches can develop alternative behaviors and structures, which would reflect the spiritual and moral transformation brought by Christ's atonement.

3.4. Gregory Boyd: Christus Victor as a Unifying Model of the Atonement

In the words of Gregory Boyd, the Christus Victor theory can serve as an "encompassing conceptual model that might reveal an 'inner logic' to all aspects of Christ's work" (Boyd 2006, p. 24).

The whole biblical narrative, Boyd says, presents the earth and its inhabitants as existing in a cosmic war zone. Humans can be liberated from evil forces only through the radical in-breaking of God (pp. 27–28). The powers opposing God can be closely related to "the destructive spiritual force of various social structures and people groups—nations, governments, religions, classes, races, tribes", etc. Therefore, sin is viewed not as a matter of individual behavior, but as a quasi-autonomous power that holds people in bondage (p. 29). The healings, exorcisms, and resuscitations in the earthly ministry of Christ were weakening the power of the devil and advancing God's Kingdom. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus disarmed the evil powers, made public display of them (Col 2:15), and delivered people from bondage to sin and death (Heb 2:14–15). Humans can be saved only when the primary cause of their predicament is removed, which is why Boyd says that Christ's redemptive ministry has a cosmic significance: "Christ has in principle freed the cosmos from its demonic oppression and thus freed all inhabitants of the cosmos who will simply submit to this new loving reign" (Boyd 2006, p. 35). Now all spiritual progress in human life is achieved by partaking in this, God's victory. Thus, in Boyd's presentation of New Testament teaching we see how different aspects of Christ's ministry are joined by the one idea of God's victory over the powers of evil. The lives of the followers of Jesus also should be guided by one idea: that is, to imitate His life, manifest Kingdom values, and engage in His warfare (p. 40).

According to Boyd, the Christus Victor model of the atonement may serve as a unifying principle for the essential truths of other atonement models. Thus Christ died as our substitute (by becoming the new Adam and bearing the consequences of our sin), He

gave His life as ransom for many (by releasing us from slavery to the devil, sin, and death); He recapitulated humankind (by His obedience, reversing the fall of the old Adam, and giving a new nature to humanity through the Spirit); He healed humanity (by freeing us from the disease of sin, removing our spiritual blindness, and transforming us into His likeness); He demonstrated His righteous stance against all sin (by suffering the violent force of evil for the sake of our sin); He gave us the example of overcoming evil and empowered us to follow Him and participate in the divine nature. Thus, just like so many aspects of Jesus' earthly ministry, the basic ideas of all models of the atonement "can be understood as one thing—overcome evil with good" (pp. 42–45).

Boyd's unifying model seems to present the most successful attempt to engage with the Christus Victor motif. He presents a biblically warranted, doctrinally sound and logically coherent theory, in which he manages to seamlessly integrate all the facets of Jesus' earthly ministry and the advantages of other atonement theories. Boyd shows a clear dependence between human salvation and the ontological cosmic victory of God over the powers of evil. Freedom from sin and new life is not possible without a preceding defeat of the devil through the ministry of Jesus. Finally, Boyd's interpretation of Christus Victor has many practical advantages: (1) it demonstrates that the redemptive ministry of Jesus is to be deeply embedded in the life of the believer—what Jesus did *for* man directly relates to what is enacted *in* man and *through* man who participates in God's victory in his daily endeavors; (2) it not only assures of the reality of evil powers, but shows their impact on many structures and spheres of human life. Christus Victor encourages Jesus' followers "to resist the demonically seductive pull of nationalism, patriotism, culturally endorsed violence, greed, racism and a host of other cultural evils" (p. 48).

4. "Forward, to the Fathers!"

This motto is ascribed to the well-known Russian Orthodox theologian Georges Florovsky who once called for a creative appropriation of the patristic legacy: "'Following the fathers' always means moving forwards, not backwards; it means fidelity to the patristic spirit and not just to the patristic letter. One must be steeped in the inspiration of the patristic flame and not simply be a gardener pottering around amongst ancient texts" (Florovsky 1972, p. 294). It appears that Aulén's Christus Victor proposal indicated the same intention not only in turning us to a "well-forgotten old" patristic thought on the atonement, but in presenting to us new perspectives relevant to our realities.

At the end of his study, Aulén prophetically stated that "no form of Christian teaching has any future before it except such as can keep steadily in view the reality of the evil in the world, and go to meet the evil with a battle-song of triumph" (Aulén 2003, p. 156). All the contemporary Christus Victor versions, surveyed above, accept this Aulén challenge.

As we have seen, the Christus Victor model and its contemporary interpretations underscore that the main problem of redemption is human bondage to sin, death, and the devil. Consequently, the atonement is not directed at satisfying God's justice, but at conquering the devil, snatching man from the power of evil, and making him available for God's transformational activity. Thus, the atonement is seen as God's continuous act through Christ in the Spirit, where all the persons of the Trinity are united for one purpose—bringing man back into fellowship with themselves. Without the radical in-breaking of God through Christ, His multifaceted ministry of undoing the grip of evil on human life, and His death and resurrection, it would be useless to conceive of human salvation and the consequent possibility for people to advance God's Kingdom in everyday life. As we have seen, unfortunately, not all presented contemporary interpretations of the Christus Victor motif are consistent in this respect. Ray's and Weaver's "demythologized" views of evil seem to seriously downplay the ethical and doctrinal advantages of this atonement model.

Secondly, the deliverance from the human predicament is not achieved exclusively by the death of Christ. Contrary to that, the Christus Victor view of the atonement holds all aspects of Jesus' ministry (incarnation, life, death, and resurrection) as valuable for human salvation. As Christ successfully opposed the evil powers throughout His ministry,

He continued the struggle in his death and resurrection. While Jesus' life and teaching gave a substantial background for Christian discipleship, His resurrection had important ontological significance, because it destroyed death and made the powers of the coming age available to believers.

Finally, we have pointed out that the logic of the Christus Victor model is incompatible with the conventional concept of retributive justice, and thus avoids accusations of promoting ideas of violence. The Gospel narratives as well as patristic interpretations of the atonement demonstrate that God achieves His victory over the devil exclusively through nonviolent means. As all contemporary Christus Victor versions show, this concept has a marked ethical potential, because it assumes that one has to participate in the life of the risen Lord through His Spirit. The Christian is to continue the redemptive work of Christ in everyday life by loving, showing mercy and forgiveness, and by opposing all kinds of evil instead of simply enjoying his personal salvation. Thus, this model of the atonement proves to be more relevant to responding to the challenges of today's world, and providing a substantial background for Christian spiritual life and ethics.

Undoubtedly, the Christus Victor paradigm of the atonement meets the concerns associated with the penal substitution theory. It appears that, having gone the full circle, contemporary Protestant theologians have more or less successfully returned to a balanced biblical teaching on the atonement as it was appropriated and explicated by the Church fathers. One may hope that this tendency will provide a common ground to address different doctrinal paradigms of the Christian East and West and contribute to promoting unity among the followers of Christ.

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Notes

1 Attempts to ground the penal substitution theory of the atonement in the patristic legacy seem to be far-fetched. In these interpretations, all too familiar wording, such as 'punishment', 'death', 'for us' and the like seem to be taken out of context without any attempt at aligning them to the Church Fathers' train of thought or the genre of their works. See, for example: (Jeffery et al. 2007, p. 164 ff; Williams 2011).

2 Though the direct influence of Anselm's doctrine of the atonement on the Reformers is debatable, there is enough evidence of Luther's familiarity with Anselm's works. See, for example: (Burnell 1992). Be that as it may, it is widely admitted that the Reformers' thought on the atonement developed within the framework of Anselm's ideas. As Paul Helm aptly puts it with regard to Calvin: "Since in drawing attention to Calvin's Anselmianism no direct influence is evident, perhaps the true explanation of Calvin's language is simply that Anselmianism was 'in the air' in the circles in which he first learned theology, and that he came to believe that this outlook fairly expressed the biblical view". See: (Helm 2008, p. 59).

3 It is clear that with respect to the devil's role in the atonement, both Reformers followed the well known Anselmian paradigm—the enemy's activity is totally subjected to and guided by God. Luther, on the one hand, describes Jesus on the Cross as Christus Victor fighting a marvelous duel (*duellum mirabile*) with personified powers of evil. Sin, Death, and the Curse attack Christ trying to devour (*devorare*) Him, but He defeats them with His absolute righteousness, life, blessedness in His own body, in Himself. On the other hand, we find among Christ's enemies the Law (*Lex*) and the Divine wrath (*Divine ira*), which Luther identifies with the Curse (Luther. WA 40.I. s. 437–40). Thus, as Paul Althaus aptly points out, "This is an indication of the fact that the powers with which Christ must do battle are ultimately to be understood theocentrically. God's wrath is one of them and is the real threatening and killing power in them all" (Althaus 1996, p. 209–10). We may see the same tendency in Calvin's understanding of the devil as "the minister of divine vengeance" (Calvin 1960, I.14.18) or "the instrument of God's wrath" (ibid., II.4.2). The victory over Satan is won when the death on the Cross satisfies divine justice and deprives the accuser of his legal power over men. See: (Blocher 2004, pp. 290–92).

4 Characteristically Anselm does not actually mention Christ's resurrection in *Cur Deus homo*. As for the Reformers, in their view Christ's rising from the dead confirms His victory and establishes righteousness, proves His divinity and makes His power available to believers (cf. Luther 1911, WA 40.1. s. 270, 546; Calvin 1960, II.16.13). However they speak of resurrection, they still

see the crux of God's redeeming work in satisfaction of God's justice through Christ's death on the Cross: "Yet to define the way of salvation more exactly, Scripture ascribes this as peculiar and proper to Christ's death . . . But because trembling consciences find repose only in sacrifice and cleansing by which sins are expiated, we are duly directed thither; and for us the substance of life is set in the death of Christ (Calvin, II.16.5; cf. Luther, WA 40.I, s. 281).

5 There has been a lot of discussion over the interpretation of the key concepts of the penal substitution theory, such as 'propitiation/expiation', 'justification', 'justice/righteousness', 'wrath', 'judgment', to mention but a few works on the issue: (Young 1983; Wright 2009; Marshall 2001; Belousek 2011; Lane 2001; Travis 2009).

6 See: (Gunton 2003; Baker and Green 2011).

7 See: (Belousek 2011, pp. 295–99; Fiddes 1989, p. 108; Baker and Green 2011, pp. 83, 174; Smail 2005, p. 87).

8 Recently there have been several attempts to resolve this tension by showing the unity within the Trinitarian relationships. Some suggest that on the Cross the Father identified Himself with the Son to such an extent that He "endured and exhausted his own wrath against human sin" (Jensen 1993, p. 158; see also: Volf 2006, p. 145). Others appeal to the doctrine of divine simplicity, which implies that God's properties cannot contradict each other and are identical with His actions. God is pure act, He is one in His potentiality and actuality, therefore, God's 'discrete' actions in history are based on underlying and transcendent unity (Vidu 2014, p. 259). In other words, though it may appear that in His earthly ministry and the death on the Cross God's Son shows different character, properties, and motivation than His Heavenly Father, in reality they are one and the same (McCall 2012, p. 80, 88–89).Though these arguments seem logically impeccable, they refute what the penal substitution theory itself tries to assert. Namely, if God's justice represents the nature of God Himself, and if this justice being offended by human sin demands satisfaction, then by definition we are dealing with the Divine dissatisfaction and, thus, with some sort of conflict of His attributes. Therefore, it would be more natural to profess—as Luther, Calvin, and other adherers of the satisfaction theory did—that via punishment of His Son, the Father tempers justice with mercy and offers forgiveness to human beings. That is why the dereliction on the Cross motif played a very important role in the Reformers' teaching of the atonement (Luther 1892, WA 5, s. 602–3; Calvin 1960, II.16.11), and since then has become a *sine qua non* of all penal substitution presentations.

9 See: (Stott 1986, pp. 35, 235, 238; Grudem 1994, pp. 615–16).

10 As some critics have pointed out, the significance of the doctrine of the resurrection is downplayed in contemporary accounts of the doctrine of the atonement. Thus, as Belousek notes (Belousek 2011, p. 110), in a recent extensive (over 450 pages) collection of essays on the atonement (Hill and James III 2004), there are only four brief discussions of Christ's resurrection. Or, as pointed out by Baker and Green (2011, p. 180), J. Packer in his influential essay *What Did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution* (Packer 2008) makes no mention of resurrection in listing the most important elements of the penal substitution doctrine.

11 For example: "Not only love and punishment compatible, but the very principle behind the capital punishment is the one that made the cross necessary. It is a principle 'a life for a life'. Concept behind substitutionary atonement, that it takes life to atone for a life (Lev 17:11), is what makes capital punishment necessary for capital crimes. If there were any other way to satisfy justice and release grace, surely God would have found it rather than sacrificing his only beloved Son" (Geisler 1989, p. 197).

12 Immanuel Kant noted that personal moral guilt for sin cannot be transferred from the guilty to the innocent, even if the latter is so benevolent as to take the guilt on himself. Such a situation would be possible within a legal system where one may choose to pay a fine or the debt of the other, but it is not possible within the realm of morality and personal relationships where moral guilt is not a transmissible liability. To say otherwise is to jumble the moral and the legal categories (Kant 1999, pp. 88–89).

13 It is a *locus communis* among historical theologians to raise concern with regard to the patristic idea of deceiving the devil. Though the New Testament texts clearly tell about messianic misconceptions about Jesus (Lk 24:18–21; Acts 13:27, etc.) or "the secret and hidden wisdom of God" (1 Cor 2:7–8) which was displayed through Christ's crucifixion and, thus, achieved victory over the evil powers, the apostolic authors do not explicate this idea. Later the Church Fathers develop this theme by using various images and metaphors. Whether they used an image of a baited mousetrap, as Augustine, or that of a fishhook, as Gregory of Nyssa and many others did, they were trying to underscore the idea of God's defeat of the devil, victory of life over death, as the evil reality encounters the goodness and divinity of Jesus Christ (for one of the best recent treatments of this patristic imagery see: Lombardo 2014, pp. 198–203). In his presentation of the atonement Finger offers a very convincing explanation of God's "deceit" of the devil: "In other words, the powers could be 'deceived' not because Christ intentionally tricked them but because of their own assumptions about power and how it is exercised . . . Jesus' enemies, then, were deceived because they could not imagine that any actual kingdom, especially not one claiming to represent the ultimate deity, could possibly be established in this way" (Finger 1985, p. 333).

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Article

When the Gap between Academic Theology and the Church Makes Possible the Orthodox–Evangelical Dialogue

Dănuț Jemna [1,*] and Dănuț Mănăstireanu [2]

[1] Economics & Business Administration, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, 700506 Iași, Romania
[2] Independent Researcher, Glasgow G32 0PA, UK; danutm@gmail.com
* Correspondence: danut.jemna@uaic.ro

Abstract: In the church tradition, we find that the great theologians were also deeply involved in the life of the church as bishops, priests, or pastors who served the believers in their parishes, though, even at that time, practicing theology started to drift apart from performing pastoral work. In Modernity, however, things began to change radically, especially with the development of theology as an academic discipline and even more so with the development of the profession of the theologian specializing in religious studies. This phenomenon penetrated Protestant churches in particular, but it is also found in Orthodoxy. In this study, we advance the hypothesis that, despite its negative connotation, the gap between academic theology and church life opens up the possibility of a promising dialogue between Evangelicals and the Orthodox in Romania. Especially in the last 30 years, theologians from both communities have interacted in the context of doctoral research, scientific conferences, and research projects, although the dialogue between church leaders and hierarchs is almost non-existent. We analyze whether this incipient theological dialogue could possibly create a bridge between the two communities and within them and between academia and the church. We believe that one of the best ways to reduce the distance between them is to build on the interest of the current generation of theologians from both churches in Biblical studies, in Patristic theology, and in the work of the Romanian theologian Dumitru Stăniloae.

Keywords: Orthodox; Evangelical; ecumenism; Patristics; Stăniloae

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1. Introduction

Today, all church traditions face, to a greater or lesser extent, a certain fracture between academic theology and the life of the church. The idea of a priest-theologian or of a pastor-theologian (Hiestand and Wilson 2015) returns more and more to the attention of some specialists, who are also interested in finding relevant solutions for the abovementioned rifts. The theme of the distance between theology and the church has been analyzed by various theologians both in the Orthodox tradition (Florovsky 1972) and in the Evangelical Protestant one (Hiestand 2008). Some of these studies target specific contexts such as that of South Africa (Womack and Pillay 2019) or Romania (Coman 2019).

The existing literature on the gap between academic theology and the church emphasizes the implications of the problem in the contemporary context and aims at analyzing the past to identify where this fracture comes from. In our estimation, discussion about this phenomenon occurring (Womack and Pillay 2019) only after the Reformation is restrictive and does not consider several important dynamics regarding its evolution in the earlier Christian tradition, such as the relationship between faith and reason, on the one hand, and that between the charisma and the ecclesial institution, on the other. Moreover, the existing studies do not take sufficiently into account the importance of interconfessional dialogue, nor the mutual influence between the different ecclesial traditions from certain geographical areas.

With respect to Romania, the evaluation of the relationship between the church and academic theology is underdeveloped. We find only descriptive assessments made by

Orthodox theologians (Stăniloae 1993; Coman 1995), while leaders from the minority Evangelical denominations have not yet engaged with this phenomenon. In the context of the Orthodox–Evangelical dialogue, this theme is important, because it aims at a common reality in the two traditions and at possible implications of interconfessional interactions at the academic level that have been developed over the last few decades.

In this paper, we will analyze the gap between academic theology and church life in Romania. We advance here the hypothesis that the distance between the two is a reality that opens up the possibility of a certain degree of engagement between Evangelicals and the Orthodox at the academic level, which might not have been possible otherwise given the opposition to ecumenism of leaders and hierarchs from both traditions. We also appreciate that these theological interconfessional relationships could be an important source for bringing theology closer to church life by emphasizing what each community could learn from the other.

The next section of this paper briefly presents the evolution of the relationship between academic theology and church life during three historical periods: Patristic, Late Medieval, and Modernity. In Section 3, this legacy of a rift between the church and theology is analyzed within the Romanian context. Section 4 evaluates how this phenomenon allowed for the development of Orthodox–Evangelical dialogue in the academy. In Section 5, starting from the existing situation in Romania, we seek to identify some possible solutions to bring church life and academic theology closer to both Orthodox and Evangelicals. The paper ends with a set of conclusions.

2. The Rift between Academic Theology and Church Life: A Brief Overview from the Patristic Period to Modernity

The potential of a rupture between theological reflection and the life of the church is somehow intrinsically linked to both the nature of religious experience and its dynamics throughout history in the various social contexts in which the Christian faith has manifested. In addressing this issue, we are using two distinctions whereby the dynamics of the Christian community can be more easily evaluated: reason vs. faith and charisma vs. institution. The reason vs. belief polarity is widely discussed by theologians and philosophers who have proposed various models regarding either the unity or the opposition, including the conflict, between them (McGrath 2017; Swinburne 2005; Plantinga 1983). Regardless of the approach employed, the understanding and use of the reason vs. faith distinction has a direct impact on the relationship between theological thinking and church life. At the same time, the way in which the relationship between personal charisma and the ecclesial institution is managed (Weber 1968; Yannaras 2013) raises significant implications for the activity of theological reflection and its association with church life. The limitations of this paper do not allow for a detailed examination of these aspects. Therefore, starting from the above distinctions, we aim to emphasize several specific characteristics of three different historical periods and their legacy with respect to the present time.

2.1. The Patristic Period

A common characteristic of the Patristic period was a certain understanding regarding the knowledge of God that can be deduced from the life and writings of the Church Fathers. For these authors, theology was the mystical experience of knowing God (Farley 1983, p. 33), which was different from the knowledge that can be achieved through the human ability to explore reality, as in philosophy, for example. Furthermore, the purpose of knowing God was not animated by purely intellectual interests, but by the experience of believers, who believed that their relationship with God defined their life in the world and their eternal destiny. The theologian was the one who prayed (Evagrius 1981, p. 64), i.e., the believer who experienced a life of faith in the community and assumed the charisma of knowledge as part of the body of Christ. The Christian theologians in the early centuries were also pastors of local churches, and their theological reflection was anchored primarily in the liturgical life of the church, not just in the current thinking of their time. The development of theological ideas was very closely related to and prompted by the need of Christian

communities to respond to pastoral and identity challenges. The theological endeavor was perceived as something somewhat risky, as it involved engaging rationally and spiritually with the mystery of God, which required a responsible and even a doxological attitude.

During this period, the relationship between theology and a life of faith was influenced, on the one hand, by the need to clarify the meaning of true faith in relation to the ideologies of heretics and persecutors and, on the other hand, by assuming Christian identity within a certain historical context marked by opposition and specific social, political, and religious realities. Although some authors argue that, for this period, we cannot yet talk about a decline in the relationship between theology and church life (Womack and Pillay 2019), we believe that certain fractures between them could already be observed at various levels. The first refers to the use of philosophy in the work of theological reflection (Hill 2003, pp. 14, 15). While for several authors, reason and faith were in conflict (Tertullian) or in a relationship of subordination (Augustine), for others, the focus was on using reason to elaborate rational statements and to fight against heretics (Justin the Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, Gregory of Nyssa).

Along with the institutionalization of the church, the Edict of Milan brought other important changes, especially regarding the vocation and charisma of ministers. In this matter, the position of the hierarch or leader of the church also received a political and administrative dimension. Moreover, the prophetic function of the theologian and of the defender of the faith was gradually impacted by their institutional and professional component also coming under the influence of political power.

After Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, in response to the relative weakening of the Christian life caused by the massive formal assimilation of Roman citizens into the church (Brown 1981, p. 18), certain Christian leaders chose to isolate themselves in the wilderness. These ascetics initiated the monastic movement and adhered to an elitist model of spirituality oriented on the strict observance of certain disciplines. Although, by doing so, they aimed at reviving the spiritual life of the church by following some specific directions (prophetic function, discipleship, and spiritual formation), several negative effects inevitably arose. For instance, certain authors of this period emphasized the practical dimension and topics strictly related to a life of faith, sometimes neglecting, or even showing a degree of hostility towards, theological reflection on the being of God or the nature of reality, which was considered abstract, speculative, and without any real benefit to believers (Wortley 2019, pp. 147–49).

2.2. Late Medieval Period

In addition to the elements underlined above, the Late Medieval Period brought about a distance, perhaps even a deeper fracture, between two Christian traditions that would develop differently to this day. Eastern and Western Christianity were separated not only by the use of Greek or Latin, but also by the cultural, social, and political contexts of the two Roman Empires, with their capitals in Constantinople and Rome. Based on this new matrix in the development of Christianity, we can highlight two aspects that marked the relationship between theology and church life.

The first is linked to an important change concerning theological thinking and the production of theological texts. On the one hand, theological writing was marked by the attempt to systematize and implicitly to elaborate a body of doctrines that would bring balance in the life of the Christian community, which was confronted with various schisms and internal tensions. The speculative dimension became increasingly important, and the tendency to elaborate a particular system of thinking became a priority. The aim was to build a theology centered on soteriology, able to respond to the need of the Christian community to have a coherent explanatory framework regarding the relationship between humanity and God. On the other hand, the monastic movement and the authors that embraced this way of life continued to highlight ideas about the practical life of the church and to elaborate various models of spirituality. Thus, during this period, the rift between dogmatic and spiritual endeavors became even more obvious.

The second aspect consists in the emergence of universities and the positioning of theology among the disciplines that underlay the training of the intellectual milieu (Holland 2019, pp. 223–46). Especially in the Late Medieval Period, European space was animated by the ideas of the ancient universalism of knowledge and by the development of formative institutions called to revive the great themes of ancient Greek and Roman culture. Theology became the queen of the disciplines that were developed during this period, each with their increasingly well-defined spheres of knowledge (Farley 1983, p. 38). Thus, Medieval scholasticism (Abelard, Aquinas) provided the platform of the relationship between theology and astronomy, mathematics, architecture, music, biology, etc. and was an expression of the intention to build an integrated system of knowledge. The result, however, be it unintentional, was an increasing gap between academia and the ecclesia.

2.3. Reformation and Modernity

Modernity was characterized by a series of ideological, political, and social transformations in relation to the previous period. The reality of tradition and religious authority, together with the role of the church institution, were re-evaluated, and their position in society was redefined. The Reformation supported these new directions, which led to the emergence of a new ecclesial tradition. Universities were among the institutions that played a central role in these transformations. In the academic sphere, theology remained an important discipline. Now, however, it was called to be defined by the rigors of scientific research: the need for a method, a careful conceptualization based on definitions and perspectives of thinking, and the development of clearly defined theological systems. The specific rationalism of this period influenced theological reflection and encouraged a reductionist approach that limited the production of ideas to what can be explained rationally. According to the scheme proposed by the university, theology became differentiated into several specialized disciplines (Farley 1983, pp. 40–42), which fragmented and further complicated its relationship with the church.

At the same time, in the space of Christian thought, the Reformation brought on an important change that shifted the attention of theologians away from the aim of developing inherited ideas towards finding answers to new questions by stimulating creativity and dialogue with other fields of knowledge on interconfessional polemics and dogmatic fairness. In addition to the positive aspects of revitalizing the life of Christian communities, the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation marked the relationship between theology and faith by overemphasizing denominational identity and by the urge to deal with tensions between Christian communities.

Sometimes faith communities pushed back against the perceived sterility of academic disputes on various theological topics, which widened the gap between theology and church life even more. Such a reaction was the pietist movement in Germany. Overall, during the Enlightenment, the church tended to develop a self-protective attitude towards the wave of rationalist influence in the academy and focused primarily on its own experience (Pillay and Womack 2018).

3. The Gap between Academia and the Church within the Romanian Context: Why and How?

Most Romanians are Eastern Orthodox. Evangelicalism penetrated the current Romanian territory in the middle of the nineteenth century in its Baptist form and, in the first few decades, mostly reached some of the ethnic minority groups (Germans, Hungarians, etc.). The first Romanian-speaking Evangelical congregations (Baptist, Brethren, Pentecostal, etc.) were formed in the beginning of the twentieth century. For most of their history, these new communities were persecuted, first by the civil authorities with support from Orthodox leaders and, after the Second World War, by the communist regime (Dobrincu 2018). The Orthodox, themselves, constantly accused Evangelicals of proselytizing on their "canonical territory", a concept which Evangelicals, who never developed a clear vision of "ethical Christian witness", thoroughly denied. Such a context was obviously not conducive to benevolent interconfessional engagement.

Furthermore, academic theological studies do not have a long history in Romania. They have existed for less than 150 years for the Orthodox, while university-level Evangelicals schools were formed only after 1989. Orthodox faculties are part of state universities, while Evangelicals created private schools, continuing the tradition of the old theological seminaries developed in the communist period. There are also two theological schools (a Baptist one in Bucharest and a Pentecostal one in Arad), which are integrated in state universities.

3.1. The Orthodox Church

Within Orthodoxy, the harmonious relationship between academia and the church is a valued tradition. This is considered a legacy from the Church Fathers, each generation having the responsibility to take it over and transmit it further (Săniloae 2005, pp. 87–89). Yet, Orthodox theological studies became part of academia at a time when university life was thoroughly dominated by the fragmentation of the various domains of knowledge characteristic to the Enlightenment paradigm. Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae (1913–1993) became aware of this rift before the Second World War, during his early theological studies, which almost made him give up his theological vocation (Stăniloae 1993, p. 635). He warned against the risk of academic theology being repetitive, past oriented, and influenced by scholasticism, which would have a negative impact on church life, blocking any spiritual renewal and progress. Finally, he believed that this kind of theology shows a lack of responsibility towards believers and towards the divine revelation (Săniloae 2005, p. 88). Similarly, Fr. Daniel Buda believed that "a theology cut off from ecclesiality or which does not resonate with the life of the Church is meaningless" (Buda 2012, p. 61).

In a recent book, Fr. Constantin Coman criticized Romanian theology's lack of interest in church iconography, prayer, and liturgical life; the absence of the prophetic dimension; and its orientation towards the past. He also underlined the disconnection of present theology from its roots in the spirituality of the Church Fathers. Moreover, he complained that some Orthodox theologians, such as the Greek Nikolaos Matsoukas, even theorized on the legitimacy of a methodological distinction between the "scientific theology" practiced in academia and a "charismatic or a spiritual theology" manifested in the ecclesia (Coman 2019, pp. 171–92). Such dichotomy is a reminder of the scholastic tendency in many Orthodox schools, which comes from the reductionist approach to theology as an academic discipline, in sharp contrast with the holistic spirituality promoted by the Church Fathers and revived by the neo-Patristic theology in Orthodoxy.

After 1990, further tensions between academia and the ecclesia were nurtured by the excessive increase of the number of Orthodox faculties of theology (14 at present) and the number of their graduates far exceeding the need for new parish priests, in addition to the significant reductions of quality teaching in these institutions due to the lack of sufficiently well-trained teachers. This crisis was temporarily averted by redirecting some of these graduates towards teaching religious education in schools, but a permanent solution is still needed.

3.2. Evangelicalism

The freedom obtained after the fall of the communist regime permitted Evangelicals to create their first university-level theological schools. The initiators were motivated by the desire to contribute to the formation of a new generation of well-trained church ministers. Because the economic capabilities of minority Evangelical communities in Romania could not cover the costs required by these new institutions, they were mostly funded by Evangelicals in the West and took over their standards, curricula, and bibliography. The result was the creation of an ethos foreign to the life of the Romanian Evangelical communities, which was strongly affected by years of harsh persecution and by the ambiguities of surviving in the communist era. This led a number of Romanian and foreign authors to argue strongly for the need to contextualize theological education to the needs and the ethos of Evangelical churches in Central and Eastern Europe (Brown and Brown 2003).

Furthermore, the Western funders of these schools (be they foreigners or Romanians in the diaspora) often tried to impose their own priorities and peculiar theological views on these institutions, which, in the end, created huge internal tensions and led to the loss of many competent teachers who did not seem to conform to the views and intentions of the funders. These tensions had nothing to do with the actual needs of local Evangelical communities, which created a growing rift between churches and academic institutions.

The separation between the ecclesia and academia in Romanian Evangelicalism is not only due to the pathologies of academic institutions, but also to the characteristics of these particular ecclesial communities, which are dominated by pietism, spirit vs. matter dualism, anti-intellectualism, etc. These communities were confronted after communism with an identity crisis and with utter ecclesial fragmentation, which are not addressed theologically or otherwise either by the leaders or by the theologians in that church tradition (Jemna 2018).

This reality has had a direct impact on the way theology is taught in Evangelical schools. In these institutions, the emphasis is not so much on the academic training of students or on forming their ability to think theologically, but rather on the technical abilities required by the pastoral profession, such as leading church services, preaching, running church councils, managing general assemblies, and pacifying dissent. In other words, in theological education, difficulties arise not only from the great distance between academia and the ecclesia. We should also discuss the negative effect of losing the distinction or of the overlap between the two. An adequate relationship between theology and the church would require, we argue, a clear distinction between the role of the two, which would allow each to challenge the other and foster a harmonious interaction.

The imbalance between academia and the ecclesia in Romanian Evangelicalism seems to be also perpetuated by the existence of a certain theological elite formed in the West. The ecumenical openness manifested immediately after 1989 encouraged some of the new Evangelical leaders to pursue not only postgraduate theological degrees in the West, but also to explore how their ecclesial tradition could be enriched by interaction with and in-depth research of Orthodox theology. An article published in 2007 listed 50 Romanian Evangelicals with PhDs in theology, many of them obtained in the West (Mănăstireanu 2007). It is estimated that today their number has at least tripled.

4. Premises for an Incipient Orthodox–Evangelical Dialogue

Theological dialogue between Evangelicals and the Orthodox in Romania is a quite recent phenomenon. Before 1989, a small number of Romanian Evangelical theologians did their theological degrees in Orthodox faculties, because their own denominations did not have university-level schools, which was a sign of openness even at that difficult time. This, however, given the latent hostility between the two ecclesial traditions, did not lead to any significant theological engagement between them.

4.1. Academic Initiatives

The situation changed radically after the fall of communism, when Romanian Evangelicals created their own academic theological institutions, and some of the emerging leaders who were doing their doctoral studies in the West made Orthodoxy one of their priority areas of study. One of the first to do so was Paul Negruț, currently the Rector of Emmanuel (Baptist) University in Oradea. His PhD thesis on the concept of authority in Orthodoxy opened the door for promising engagement with the majority tradition in Romania. Others, such as Emil Bartoș, Silviu Rogobete, Daniel Oprean, and Dragoș Stefănică, followed suit.

In 1995, Fr. Stelian Tofană, a Romanian Orthodox Biblical scholar, was invited to read a paper at the annual research conference at the aforementioned Baptist theological school. The presence of various Orthodox theologians became common place in the following years, not only in Oradea, but also at the Evangelical institutes in Bucharest, where the Baptist theologian Otniel Bunaciu and the Pentecostal theologian John Tipei led the way in opening up their schools to theologians from the Orthodox and other church traditions.

Romanian Evangelical scholars have also been involved, together with the Orthodox, Catholics, and mainline Protestants in the activities of the Romanian Biblical Scholars Union since its inception in 2005, which also resulted in several of their articles being included in the annual publication of the Union.

Orthodox theological schools were more reluctant to invite Evangelical scholars to their institutions. Yet, from time to time that happened, particularly for international conferences. Moreover, until now, no Orthodox scholar had been invited to teach at an Evangelical school in Romania. Alternatively, it is quite hard to imagine that an Evangelical scholar would ever be invited to teach at an Orthodox school.

One other dimension in the cooperation between Evangelical and Orthodox theologians was in the context of the Romanian Biblical Interconfessional Society. Even if these interactions have not resulted in the creation of an ecumenical translation of the Bible, as expected, and probably never will, which is reflective of the still-difficult relations between the two church traditions, nevertheless the mere existence of such efforts represents huge progress in contrast with the open hostility between them in the past.

Finally, the interaction between Evangelical and Orthodox scholars was occasioned by their participation in common publishing projects, resulting either from previous ecumenical conferences or from ad hoc initiatives. It is not by chance that these projects were related to the theology of Fr. D. Stăniloae. One recent opportunity for interaction between Romanian Orthodox and Evangelical theologians was their involvement in the events and publications initiated by the International Orthodox Theological Association (IOTA), created in 2017, whose first congress was organized in 2019 in Iasi, Romania.

4.2. Ecumenical Meetings

Although Romanian Evangelicals are not institutionally involved in the World Cuncil of Churches (WCC), the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, associated with the WCC, organized in the past few decades several theological dialogues between the Orthodox and Evangelicals, in which several leaders from both traditions were involved. Fr. Ioan Sauca, the director of the institute and currently General Secretary of the WCC, played a major role in this initiative and is deeply committed to facilitating the interaction between theologians and church leaders from the two traditions.

Although it would be hard to argue that such encounters brought major changes in the two theological camps, and even less so in relations between the two ecclesial communities, nevertheless these meetings forged some strong friendships and partnerships across the denominational divide. The most important contributions to these Bossey meetings were published in 2012, which included the works of Romanian authors, Evangelicals, such as Emil Bartoș and Otniel Bunaciu, and Orthodox, such as Ioan Sauca, Vasile Mihoc, and Stelian Tofană (Grass et al. 2012).

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (18–25 January) used to be a good annual opportunity for some ecumenically minded Romanian Evangelicals and Orthodox members to meet and worship together. Since 2009, however, when the Orthodox Metr. Nicolae Corneanu participated inadvertently in a Greek-Catholic eucharistic celebration, Orthodox priests have been actively discouraged from participating in ecumenical worship.

One of the most active current platforms for encouraging Evangelical–Orthodox interaction, particularly in the area of mission work, is the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative, initiated after the Third Congress of the Lausanne Movement[1]. Evangelical and Orthodox Romanian theologians are actively involved in the projects and actions of this movement (for details, see http://loimission.net, accessed on 15 April 2021).

Ecumenical meetings have been opportunities for Romanian theologians from both traditions to interact and learn from each other, as Metr. Kallistos Ware suggests (Ware 2011). This allowed Evangelicals to become more open to the spiritual treasure of the Christian tra-

[1] The Lausanne Movement was founded with the 1974 Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization as a platform for Evangelical leaders with the mission "to connect influencers and ideas for global mission".

dition, to appreciate the works of the Church Fathers, to comprehend the communitarian dimension of salvation, and to assess the value of the sacraments and of the liturgy. The revived interest in Patristics in many Evangelical theological schools is a clear indication of this trend. The Wheaton Center for Early Christian Studies (https://www.wheaton.edu/academics/school-of-biblical-and-theological-studies/the-wheaton-center-for-early-christian-studies/, accessed on 15 April 2021) at Wheaton College, Il., is just one example.

In turn, the Orthodox could be challenged by the Evangelical passion for the study of the Bible and mission work, the active role of the laity in the life of the church, and the personal character of salvation, which could enrich and revive ecclesial life in Orthodox parishes. A further contribution in this direction came from Orthodox scholars who studied in Evangelical institutions, mostly in the West, under the supervision of competent Protestant professors.

4.3. Local Projects

One of the most important gains of the last three decades of academic interactions between these two ecclesial communities was the building of personal friendships and trust between Romanian Orthodox and Evangelical theologians. In the delicate context of the little support for ecumenical encounters, if any, received from church leaders and hierarchs, such strong personal relationships account for the unlikely accomplishments of their interactions. These important human connections of friendship and reciprocal appreciation have been the basis of several local projects in which leaders and members of both communities have been involved. Their potential, especially in terms of common service to the needs of the world, should not be neglected.

Humanitarianism is one area where Evangelicals and the Orthodox could cooperate despite their theological differences. Thus, building on a strong personal friendship nurtured in the academic context, Fr. S. Tofana was invited after the year 2000, by one of the authors of this paper, then Regional Director for Faith and Development for the Middle East and Eastern Europe Region of World Vision International, to act for about a decade as chaplain for the staff of the microcredit branch of World Vision Romania, his involvement in which benefited all members of the staff and, implicitly, their clients.

One special ecumenical project, which left a lasting impact on the local community, was a weekly two-hour live religious radio program produce by a local station in Iași, Romania, of which the authors of this paper, together with an Orthodox and a Catholic priest, discussed matters of current interest to the community and responded to questions addressed by the public, with an emphasis on what unites rather than what differentiates our three ecclesial traditions. Currently, many such media opportunities are offered by radio and TV stations, as well as by various web platforms, religious or secular, in which theologians and church leaders from both traditions are invited to contribute. Such encounters contribute to overcoming taboos and demonstrating that despite their ecclesial differences, Evangelicals and the Orthodox can learn from each other and live peacefully together in their communities.

5. Potential Solutions for Reducing the Distance between Academic Theology and the Church

In Romania, for both the Orthodox and Evangelicals, the relationship between the church and academic theology has a paradoxical character, which is manifested in specific ways. Most Romanian theologians are priests and pastors who serve in local communities. Despite this reality, they play two different roles at the same time and somehow participate in two different worlds, between which, over time, a certain distance and tension was created. To identify potential solutions to bridge the gap between academic theology and church life, we need to consider not only this specificity, but also some resources that have been insufficiently utilized. In our opinion, at least three areas could provide support for concrete actions and projects with an impact on the relationship between academic theology and the churches: the significant number of competent theologians and their

work; the national and international dialogue in which theologians from both traditions participate; and the infrastructure of religion teachers in the general education system.

5.1. Theological Resources: Persons and Their Works

Nowadays, the Orthodox and Evangelical churches in Romania have at their disposal important resources, having produced valuable theological texts validated by specialists at national and international levels. This academic potential could be a solid foundation for initiatives that bring the church closer to academic theology.

Within the limits of this study, it is sufficient to appeal the most notable example of Fr. D. Stăniloae (Nassif 2001). Along with other neo-Patristic thinkers (Florovsky 1972, pp. 110–15), this Romanian theologian underlined the real danger of the split between the academic and ecclesiastic areas and between a scholastic theology and the church liturgical life. He was convinced that the development of Romanian theology requires the translation of the Church Fathers, so that believers have access to Christ as reflected in the great Patristic texts (Stăniloae 1993, p. 637). At the same time, Fr. D. Stăniloae understood that the church needed sermons with a message about the real person of Christ and not about the rules of Christian morality. He confessed that a theology of Christian love and ecumenical unity in Christ can be developed only on the basis of the Christian faith of the real, ontological connection between the Triune God and humanity (Stăniloae 1993, p. 639).

For a new generation of Romanian theologians and also for pastors and priests who are open to getting involved in the double effort of rapprochement between denominational churches and the life of Christian communities and academic theology, the life and work of Fr. D. Stăniloae can be used in several directions: as fundamental references in theological schools especially at the bachelor's and master's degree levels; as a field of research that allows for the organization of conferences and the production of theological works; as an example of spirituality and service; as a support in organizing pastoral meetings and seminars; and as a platform for ecumenical meetings.

5.2. The Existing Experience of the Orthodox–Evangelical Academic Dialogue

In Romania, the Orthodox–Evangelical dialogue takes place especially at the academic level. Although this could contribute to maintaining the distance between the academy and the church, it may also impact the evolution of this relationship in the opposite direction. The last three decades of dialog between Orthodox and Evangelical theologians represents for Romania a resource that can also be beneficial for local churches from at least two points of view.

First, any type of meeting between theologians represents an opportunity for them to become more openminded to other Christian traditions and to better understand their particularities. As Romanian and foreign theologians often argued, both the Orthodox and Evangelicals have a lot of things to learn from each other (Nassif 2004; Ware 2011; Mihoc 2012). It is not just a matter of understanding the other's theological discourse, but also of going deeper into the knowledge of the spirituality and practical life of each tradition. Moreover, this reciprocal enrichment with theological and spiritual knowledge contributes to the formation of theologians involved in academic dialogue and represents a potential that can be used in the concrete ministry within local churches.

Additionally, Orthodox–Evangelical interactions are most frequently occasioned by international conferences or projects. In these meetings, the exchange between theologians from different traditions is not only important, but also the exchange between the members of the same denomination who express their faith in a highly culturally diverse world. Such exposure could lead to changes of perspective and is an important source of renewal for the ecclesial service in the local church to which every theologian belongs. In this sense, a suggestive example is offered by His Beatitude Daniel, the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, who has great international and ecumenical experience. In a well-known interview (Coman 1995, pp. 151–60), Bishop Daniel (at the time) stressed that, in Romania, there is need for a theology that is pastorally oriented to rediscover the model of the Church

Fathers in which there is no fracture between theological thinking and the real life of the local churches.

5.3. Religious Teachers in the General Education System

In 2014, the teaching of religion in general education schools in Romania became optional rather than mandatory. This stirred a series of debates both on the role of religion in the public space and the situation of teachers who have taught this discipline and who risk losing their jobs. In this context, at a conference organized by the Iasi School Coordination Authority in 2015, which was attended by religion teachers and church representatives, one of the authors of this paper argued that this situation could be transformed into an opportunity for the church. In Romania, teaching religion in schools means that students participate in catechism classes organized according to the confessional specifics of each church. However, that is the responsibility of the church, not of the school. Therefore, a paradigm shift is needed in this field. Thus, at the school level, religion professors could teach general religious education, while at the same time, they could be involved in catechesis programs for members of local churches. As a result, this human resource does not need to be reclassified or reoriented. If such a solution were to be implemented, the benefit for the church would be enormous.

In our opinion, religious teachers could also play a key role in creating a strong connection between local churches and academic institutions. On the one hand, teachers need theological formation and should be in continuous dialogue with academics from universities. On the other hand, their contribution concerns the instruction of believers in local churches according to their specific spiritual needs. Therefore, religion teachers could be a strategic interface between church life and academic theology and a catalytic factor for stimulating theological reflection in relation to the spiritual needs of the Christian community (Luodeslampi et al. 2019). Finally, by being present in schools, they could support the culture of interfaith dialogue and knowledge and respect for the diversity of expression of the Christian faith. This, however, depends on the ecumenical openness and expertise of these teachers, the formation of whom needs to become a priority of academic theological formation programs.

6. Conclusions

We conclude our study with a series of summary considerations. We began by underlining the importance of being aware of the tendency of separating the life of the church from theological reflection, which we have inherited from the past. This, we believe, dates not just from after the Reformation, under the influence of the Enlightenment; however, as important as its impact might have been in this direction, its incipient manifestations could be identified even in the Patristic era, with each of the following periods adding their specific contribution.

This distancing is also evidenced within the Orthodox and Evangelical communities in Romania, even though the majority of the theologians in these traditions are also church ministers. In the case of the Orthodox, the rift between the ecclesia and academia appeared under the impact of the secular model of the modern university and as an effect of the scholastic approach that still dominates Orthodox theological education, although this way of practicing theology is perceived by many neo-Patristic theologians as being foreign to the spirit of Orthodoxy. For Evangelicals, the distance between the theological formation and the life of the local Christian communities is rooted in the ecclesial fragmentation specific to Evangelicalism and its inherited anti-intellectualism, which leads to downplaying the importance of academia.

Certainly, each of these ecclesial traditions is responsible for finding adequate solutions to bring healing to this rift within their own communities. It is our contention, however, that more inspiration in the search for such necessary healing could come from lessons learned in the various kinds of interactions between Orthodox and Evangelical theologians. Because dialogue and cooperation between these church traditions has not yet been institutionalized,

the only chance for such exchange of views to take place is in the context of academic, ecumenical, and local initiatives that allow representatives of these communities to work together and learn from each other. As this sort of interaction becomes more visible and its positive impact in the life of the respective communities is more convincing, there is a growing chance that Evangelical church leaders and Orthodox hierarchs will have more positive feelings towards ecumenical engagement, which, in turn, could lead to common efforts for finding adequate solutions to a common problem.

For Romania, the future of the relationship between academia and the ecclesia, as well as that of interconfessional dialogue, depends to a large extent on the quality and vision of the leaders of the respective communities. In both traditions, we already have in the country a solid and growing number of theologians who are meeting regularly, exchanging views, and cooperating in various projects of smaller or larger scale. The theological work of Fr. D. Stăniloae has already proved to offer a fertile meeting ground for these efforts. These open-minded theologians could contribute to the formation of a new generation of priest and pastors, who are solidly rooted in the identity of their own church traditions and do not feel threatened in reaching out to their brothers and sisters in Christ from other communities. Furthermore, they could also contribute to the formation of a new cohort of ecumenically minded religious education teachers, who would be able to bring the faith treasury of the church closer to the hearts of children and adults, either in the context of the school or in the catechetic context of local church communities.

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Ecumenical Convergences: Romanian Evangelicals Exploring Orthodoxy

Cristian Sonea

Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Babes-Bolyai University, 400084 Cluj-Napoca, Romania; cristian.sonea@ubbcluj.ro

Abstract: Historically, in Romania, the relations between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the evangelical communities have been characterized by tension and mutual distrust. That is why, unfortunately, there has been no official dialogue between the two communities so far. The present article investigates the theoretical possibility for such an ecumenical dialogue to occur by analysing the contributions of several evangelical theologians who published research studies on theological topics specific to Eastern orthodox theology. Their positions were analysed from the perspective of an inclusive theology which allowed us to identify some common themes for both traditions: the authority in interpreting the Scriptures, salvation as a process, and the Church understood through the application of a perichoretic model. All these convergent themes could constitute the basis for a future official ecumenical dialogue between the evangelicals and the orthodox from Romania.

Keywords: ecumenical convergence; Romanian evangelicals; Bible authority; deification; perichoretic model; inaugurated eschatology; proselytism

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1. Introduction

The ecumenical relations in Romania are currently going through a challenging phase. Some even consider it a crisis of the ecumenical dialogue in its institutionalised form (See: Plaatjies van Huffel 2017; Davids 1999). The relationship between the orthodox and the evangelical Christians in Romania is no different, and, so far, there have been no official dialogues between the two communities. There are many possible causes for the lack of cooperation, but they seem to be different from those affecting the ecumenical dialogue at a global level. Both Christian communities are responsible for the current situation. On the one hand, evangelicals motivate their lack of openness towards dialogue with the orthodox through the historical wounds caused by the persecutions on the part of the orthodox Christians towards evangelicals. On the other hand, the orthodox are more reserved because of the aggressive proselytism practiced by the evangelicals in some cases, but also because evangelical theology is relatively new in Romania (in comparison to orthodox theology), which sometimes gives birth to a condescending attitude towards the evangelicals. When presenting the history of the evangelicals in Romania in the second half of the XIXth century, Dorn Dobrincu talks about the persecutions the baptist and pentecostal evangelicals went through, caused both by the state and the historical churches (Dobrincu 2018, pp. 48–77). On the other hand, the accusations regarding proselytism from the part of the evangelicals have been commonplace in the orthodox environments for a long time now. The orthodox thus claim that the evangelicals use any means (more or less honest/fair) to attract orthodox believers to their churches. (Mănăstireanu 2018, p. 271)

Still, there have been several initiatives to encourage a dialogue between the two communities. From personal relations among theologians to conferences open to scholars belonging to both traditions, these initiatives sometimes materialized in notable theological research studies (See: Oxbrow and Grass 2021, 2015; Grass et al. 2012; Zondervan et al. 2010). The purpose of this article is to offer an inventory of some convergent theological topics, more specifically those identified by evangelical theologians in Eastern orthodox

theology. The article is an attempt to offer some answers to three evangelical authors who present their views on how orthodox theology approaches topics such as the authority of the scriptures (Paul Negruț), the orthodox soteriology (Emil Bartoș) and the orthodox ecclesiology (Dănuț Mănăstireanu). These topics include important points of convergence, as well as some differences, so they could constitute a good theological ground for official dialogue between the Romanian evangelical and orthodox communities.

2. What Is the Meaning of Ecumenical Convergence?

Generally speaking, the term convergence refers to the effort made by two entities in order to reach the same point or to achieve the same goal. In other words, the process is initiated with the purpose of reaching unity by accommodating two separate realities. From a theological point of view, we use the word convergence when referring to the relations between Christianity and non-Christian religions. So, on the one hand, theological convergence is a process that refers to the necessity of finding common ground when interacting with a different religious tradition, and, on the other hand, it is a notion used to describe the encounter between two different realities (Dhavamony 2003, p. 245). In an ecumenical context, convergence involves the complex effort of the divided Christian communities to reach unity. The purpose of the institutionalised ecumenical movement is to offer a common Christian witness to the world. Thus, the declared aim of the ecumenical movement is to achieve the visible unity of all Christians. For this purpose, all those involved in the ecumenical dialogue, based on their spiritual, liturgical or sacramental experiences and inspired by their own traditions, elaborate various ecumenical syntheses that although not always the result of theological consensus do however represent factors of theological convergence, in hope of a future Christian unity (Leuștean 2002, pp. 40–41).

There is a risk of interpreting the hermeneutics of ecumenical convergence as an attempt to level out the differences between the evangelicals and the orthodox, in the name of unity. However, this type of approach does not postulate in any way the absence of divergences, which are of course numerous and, in most cases, well known both by the evangelicals and the orthodox. In fact, the differences are emphasized to such a degree, in the Romanian context, that the more radical representatives of the two communities go as far as denying any convergence. That is why I decided to give priority to the ecumenical convergence here and to place it at the very basis of the ecumenical dialogue and perhaps a future study could discuss the theological differences as well.

Therefore, this particular concept—ecumenical convergence—represents the filter through which the present study analyses the positions on various theological topics of several theologians belonging to the two traditions. More specifically, I started by identifying evangelical theologians who published research on orthodox theology, and I then tried to synthetize and offer a critical evaluation of the convergent elements I found in their works. For this particular research, I selected only three authors for the following reasons: first of all, it would have been impossible to offer an extensive account of all the evangelical authors who wrote about orthodox theology, even if I had chosen to organize the material thematically. The second reason is connected to the particularities of evangelical theology, in which personal theological approaches do not have to be accepted on a general level, so personal views can and should be emphasized anyway. The third reason has to do with a certain degree of openness towards the dialogue of the three authors, which made it easy for me to identify the convergences. From the very beginning, I would like to state that the arguments presented in this paper can be included within the framework of an inclusivist orthodox ecclesiology, adopting George Florovsky's theological opinion regarding the limits of the church. Florovsky argues that the charismatic limits of the church can be mystically found in other Christian communities as well (See: Florovsky 1933, pp. 120–29). I will also mention Dumitru Stăniloae here, according to whom although non-orthodox confessions did indeed separate from the church, they kept a connection with her and are, in a sense, contained by her, to the extent to which they did not completely part from the Tradition of the Church (Stăniloae 1997, vol. 2, pp. 275–76).

3. Hallmarks of the Orthodox-Evangelical Dialogue

Besides the interest that Romanian evangelicals have for the orthodox faith in a country that is mostly orthodox, we also acknowledge the more general interest evangelicals have towards traditional faiths.

Thus, Daniel Clendenin notices that the evangelicals have promoted an ahistorical faith, out of ignorance, because of a superficial understanding of sola scriptura, or due to the conviction that "Bible believers" should and can keep the distance from a corrupt society. At the initiative of Robert Webber, Donald Bloesch, and Thomas Howard, the evangelicals organised a conference for those who had a certain appreciation for the "orthodox evangelicals" and issued a document entitled "The Chicago Call: An Appeal to Evangelicals" (1978). Among other things mentioned in the document, we find the idea that evangelicals have neglected history and allowed themselves to be led by a sectarian spirit and proposed a return to a faith connected to patristic theology, councils, creeds, and "the catholicity of historic Christianity" (Clendenin 2003, p. 178). Similarly, in 1936 at the International Congress of the orthodox theologians in Athens, George Florovsky was urging the participants to go "back to the Fathers of the Church!" and he expressed his belief that the divisions among Christians can only be overcome "by a return to the common mind of the early Church." (Gavrilyuk 2015, p. 2).

Again, part of the same trend of returning to the primary sources, we find the story of Peter E. Gillquist who, together with a group of colleagues started studying church history and became acquainted with the earliest forms of Christianity. In 1973, they started a network of house churches in the United States, with the purpose of restoring the "ancient church", which they called the New Covenant Apostolic Order. After some research about the early church, they then started practicing a more liturgical type of worship and became interested in the idea of apostolic succession. This eventually determined most members of the group to join the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America in 1987. Thanks to Gillquist's efforts, seventeen parishes with 2000 members converted to the Antiochian Archdiocese and they became known as the Antiochian Evangelical Orthodox Mission (Gillquist 1989, pp. 5–8).

Apart from these quests for the traditional forms of Christianity, another event that marked the relations between the two traditions was the Canberra Assembly of the World Council of Churches, from 1991. The topic of the Holy Spirit's presence and activity in creation led to a heated debate regarding "spirits", stimulated particularly by Chung Kyung-Hyung's plenary presentation. Two of the groups participating in the conference were extremely critical towards Chung Kyung-Hyung's presentation: the orthodox and the evangelicals. The two groups expressed their concern in open letters that were read out loud to the other participants. The orthodox remarked that "some have the tendency to easily affirm the presence of the Holy Spirit in many movements or evolutions without proper discernment" and warned against "the tendency to wrongly identify the personal spirit, the spirit of the world or other spirits with the Holy Spirit" (Pirri-Simonian and Beek 2012, p. 6). They also brought up other subjects such as the dialogue with other religions and the understanding of salvation through Jesus Christ. In their letter, on the other hand, the evangelicals insisted that "a lot of discernment is necessary in order to identify the Spirit with the Spirit of Christ" and they pleaded for a high Christology as the only authentic Christian basis in dialogue with those "belonging to other faiths" (Pirri-Simonian and Beek 2012, p. 6). They also remarked upon the many "engagements and theological preoccupations they had in common with the orthodox" and asked to "start a dialogue between the evangelicals and the orthodox as soon as possible" (Pirri-Simonian and Beek 2012, pp. 6–7). After the event, three important consultations took place: one in 1993, in Stuttgart, with the topic: "The Bible and the Tradition", one in 1995, in Alexandria, with the topic: "The Proclamation of Christ today" and another one in 1998, in Hamburg, with the topic: "The return to God—Joy in hope"(Pirri-Simonian and Beek 2012, pp. 15–18). The meetings continued at the Ecumenical Institute from Bossey in 2000, 2002, 2006 (Grass et al. 2012). The first meeting (2000) dealt with the topic of salvation and concentrated on the question whether

salvation is the result of a single moment when an individual is "born again", or if it is a continuous process or perhaps both. In 2002, the topic of the meeting was the role and the place of the Bible in the two traditions, while in 2004, the meeting dealt with the nature and the purpose of the Church. The last meeting, organised in 2006, approached the more sensitive issue of anthropology (Sauca 2012, pp. 3–4). In 2013, another series of consultations started, as part of the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative, which is continuing until today (Consultations 2021). These consultations are oriented specifically towards mission, and have been documented in Oxbrow and Grass (Oxbrow and Grass 2021, 2015).

4. Romania—A Christian Country for Both: Orthodox and Evangelicals

In comparison to other European countries, Romania has a very high percentage of believers. Special Eurobarometer, 493, published in 2019 by the European Commission, indicates that Romania is the country with the smallest number of atheists in Europe: 1% (Discrimination in the European Union 2019), and according to the Special Eurobarometer, 73.1, from 2010, on the topic of biotechnology, Romania had a 92% of believers, most of them Christian, coming second in Europe, while the first place was occupied by Malta (Biotechnology 2010). It is thus obvious that religious practices in general, and especially Christian religious practices occupy an important part in the life of most Romanians. Although the number of practicing Christians is smaller than the number of those who simply declare themselves to be Christian, Romanians still seem to be very attached to their old traditions and they tend to integrate culturally or educationally many of the Christian values.

Around 324, Eusebius of Caesareea writes about the beginnings of Christianity on the Romanian territory and I will note here that his position is officially accepted and adopted by the Romanian Patriarchy. According to this tradition, Saint Apostle Andrew went from Asia to Scythia Major and then to Scythia Minor (present-day Dobrogea, Romania), and he preached in some of the Greek towns on the Black Sea shores (Păcurariu 1991, p. 13). Although this account has been contested by some theologians (including some Romanian theologians) (Stan and Turcescu 2007, pp. 47–48), who considered it to be part of a so-called protochronism (from proto-chronos, meaning "first in time"), a tendency that can be identified in many countries from the Balkans, and which promotes the idea that the ethnogenesis of the Romanian people coincides with the process of Christianisation (Stan and Turcescu 2007, p. 48). Interestingly, the apostolic origin of Romanian Christianity is also assumed by some in the evangelical communities. The former president of the Penticostal Chrisitian Community, Pavel Riviș Tipei, writes in Cuvântul Adevărului (the official magazine of the Romanian Pentecostal Community) about the apostolic origin of Pentecostalism on the Romanian territory: "We generally talk about a period of 85 years that have passed since the first Pentecostal church was founded in Romania, at Păuliș, Arad county, on 10 September 1922, but the beginnings of Pentecostalism can be traced back much earlier than that [. . .]. The Apostle Andrew was neither catholic, nor orthodox, but he was surely a Pentecostal as he was baptised with the Holy Spirit." (Riviș-Tipei 2007, pp. 3–4).

According to the latest census, the majority of the Romanian population is orthodox (86.5%). Additionally, the numbers indicate that the Romanian Orthodox Church has the second-highest number of orthodox believers after the Russian Orthodox Church. According to the same census, the evangelical communities, including pentecostals, make up for 3.3% of the entire population and they represent the only Christian community that had registered a growth in the number of believers since the previous census. In the 2002 census, 1.49% of the population was Pentecostal, while in 2011, the percentage increased with 0.41%, to a total of 1.9%, as well as an increase in the number of followers with 43,476 (INS 2011). Allen Anderson notes that the more conservative sources claim that the number of Romanian Pentecostals is somewhere around 300,000, while other sources claim it is close to 800,000 which would turn Romania into the most pentecostal country in Europe (Anderson 2004, p. 100).

Apart from the numbers, which are obviously important, it is also worth mentioning that in the collective mentality of the Romanians, the Christian faith is also part of their ethnic identity: regardless of confession, they all agree that the Romanian nation was "born Christian". So, although the first evangelical communities appeared at the beginning of the 20th century (Dobrincu 2018, p. 42), they still seem to be inclined to define their own theology as rooted in the Romanian culture (Rogobete 2001, p. 262, note 14). We can thus identify the influence of the traditional Churches in some of their teachings and practices. Just to give a few examples, in some Romanian evangelical communities, such as the Romanian Evangelical Church (the so-called tudorists who continue a movement initiated by the former orthodox priest Teodor Popescu), infant baptism is still practiced. Another similarity concerns the organisation of the ecclesial structure in the evangelical communities in comparison with the consecrated ordained members of the ecclesial body in the traditional churches. Here is an example:

> "The deacon is in charge of the administration of the offerings received by the church. He can officiate Lord's Supper, he can perform the blessing of children or funerals, if the pastor is not able to perform them. The presbyter can officiate all services, at the recommendation of the pastor. The pastor officiates all services and is in charge of the pastoral care of a local church." (Mărturisirea de credință 2021, p. 22)

> "The bishop can perform all Holy Sacraments and all church services [. . .]. The priest receives, from the bishop, through ordination, the three gifts: of teaching, sanctifying and leading [. . .]. The deacon serves as a help for the priest and the bishop." (Belu et al. 2011, p. 57)

I am not going to discuss here the theological differences, which are obvious. However, we cannot ignore the similarities regarding the relations among various sacerdotal positions. The pastor, in this case, seems to have a role that is similar to that of an orthodox bishop, who is the leader of a local church or bishopric. The presbyter, who can officiate all religious services, at the recommendation of the pastor, is similar to the priest in the orthodox tradition, who performs all liturgical services, with the consent of the bishop, while the deacon helps the other members of the clergy. Obviously, not all evangelical communities have this kind of organisation and also, even those that do have it do not necessarily admit that it is an influence of the Orthodox Church, but rather say that it has biblical roots.

The similarities can be explained through the fact that the evangelical communities once belonged to the traditional churches and then separated from them. In fact, their conversion to the evangelical movements was perceived as sheep-stealing, as a result of proselytism, while the evangelicals regarded it as a return to biblical Christianity. This is actually the main reason why the relations between the two Christian communities have often been tense. Thus, the evangelical theologians who show interest in orthodox theology, do so with the declared purpose of finding reconciliation with the other Christian traditions, in this case with the orthodox, but also because they are making an attempt to define a Romanian evangelical theology (Rogobete 2001, p. 262, note 14). We are yet to find out whether the orthodox are receptive or if they are willing to answer with the same kind of attitude. According to Bradley Nassif, "the country holds much promise for constructive relations. At present, however, the dialogue in Romania remains weak and indirect, consisting mostly of a growing awareness of the need to explore the points of contact between each other. Academically speaking, there are more evangelical students of Romanian orthodoxy than there are orthodox students of Romanian evangelicalism" (Nassif 2000, pp. 29–31).

In 2018, the Coalition for the Family, an association of several organizations of the main religious denominations in Romania had the initiative to propose a referendum in order to change the definition of marriage in the Romanian constitution. While in the Romanian constitution marriage was defined as the union between spouses, the Coalition suggested that marriage should be defined as the free union between a man and a woman,

to be more specific "the stable union between one man and one woman". Although the referendum failed due to low turnout, it did succeed in bringing together most Romanian Christian denominations. On this occasion, the Baptist Teofil Stanciu offered a short overview of the relations between the orthodox and the evangelicals for the past three decades. Stanciu explains that Christians belonging to various denominations were united under one cause because they suddenly discovered they had common moral values they wanted to defend. What was interesting, he notes, was that this recent discovery was not preceded by official dialogues between the orthodox and the evangelical leaders on the hot topics of the present-day society. They did not decide together what their position was regarding these issues. There were, however, inter-confessional interactions among academics in universities, but without much echo in the actual communities of believers. Another form of conversation, Stanciu adds, was constituted by the Ph.D. dissertations written by evangelicals under the guidance of orthodox theologians due to the lack of post-graduate programmes available in the evangelical faculties and institutes. However, the debates in the public arena, especially those related to moral issues, determined many to favour the Christian element of their identity, rather than their specific confession. Social media played an important part in this, as well as the global evolutions signalled by the press and the perceived persecutions against Christians. All these, Stanciu notes, gave birth to temporary trans-confessional solidarity. On the positive side, he explains, there is a dialogue in the academia (less influential), and another one on a wider scale, but perhaps more superficial, on the moral issues of the society. Otherwise, the lack of communication is still probably the rule, whether it is because of refusal of mutual recognition, or because of plain indifference. Finally, Stanciu appreciates the fact the orthodox and the evangelicals found some common ground in the current debates from the public arena, but he worries that they might remain stuck in the ideological or political realm. Although certain political, civic or social benefits can result from this, the theological dimension should not be ignored, as it is at the basis of any other initiative. We must find a way, he concludes, to put into practice, "in a creative but realistic way, the concept of unity in diversity" (Stanciu 2019).

5. Convergent Theological Topics

The divergences between the orthodox and the evangelicals are often intensely discussed in the sermons or other public speeches of the leaders of the two communities. Thus, topics such as infant baptism vs. adult baptism, sola Scriptura vs. the authority of the Tradition, sacramental priesthood vs. universal priesthood, the veneration of Holy Theotokos, the honoring of saints, icons and relics, as opposed to Christ as the only intercessor are just a few of the topics a simple believer can often hear being discussed in church. Besides these differences that surely exist, there are also a lot of convergences, much more rarely discussed, such as the authority of the Scriptures in the life of the Church, the teachings about salvation or the understanding of the church as koinonia.

5.1. The Authority of the Bible in the Romanian Orthodox Church in the Work of Paul Negruț

The Romanian evangelical theologians approach a wide range of topics when expressing their views on orthodoxy, such as the authority of the Bible in the Church (Negruț 1994), the theology of Stăniloae and theosis (Rogobete 2001), Scriptures (Mănăstireanu 2006); eco-theology (Mariș 2009), ecclesiology (Mănăstireanu 2012), justification (Floruț 2018), the theology of participation in God (Oprean 2019), salvation, grace and charismas (Ștefănică 2019), the role of women in Church (Sabou 2012), the ecumenical dialogue (Druhora 2020).

I will start with the classic debate concerning the place and the authority of the Bible in Church. In Paul Negruț's view, the debate started with "the translation of Scriptures into modern Romanian by Dumitru Cornilescu and the tension between Scripture and Tradition emphasized in the work of Teodor Popescu" (Negruț 1994, p. 4), a deacon and a priest who embraced the evangelical principles, which led to their exclusion from the orthodox clergy. "From the interplay between the orthodox paradigm of revelation–communion–deification and the Protestant paradigm of revelation–justification–sanctification adopted

by Cornilescu's movement there emerged within Romanian orthodoxy new hermeneutical communities which emphasize both the mystical and the ethical dimensions of biblical Christianity. Consequently, since Scripture is perceived as the "Book of the community", both laity and hierarchy participate in episteme and praxis." (Negruț 1994, p. 341)

Negruț notes that Cornilescu regarded Scripture "as the only source of theological epistemology and the supreme authority in matters of faith and practice". Thus, he continues, Cornilescu "believed that the authority to maintain a balanced relation between episteme and praxis within the Christian community is sola scriptura. Although such a belief represents a radical shift from the orthodox view, the Romanian Orthodox Church avoided any open theological debates with Cornilescu regarding biblical authority, preferring instead to reject his teachings on the grounds that they were Protestant and thus heretical" (Negruț 1994, p. 79).

Although Bible occupies a central place in the Orthodox Church, it is not considered the unique source of theological epistemology. According to Orthodox theology, the unique source is Christ, Who can be known by the community of faith. This living relationship with God is called Tradition in the Orthodox Church. Christ was known by the members of the first Christian communities, before the first books of the biblical canon were written. Thus, in the orthodox view, the Bible is a written part of the Tradition. It does play a normative role in the sense that the truth of faith cannot contradict the Scriptures, but it is not the only source of theological epistemology. The orthodox Church never embraced Dumitru Cornilescu's and Teodor Popescu's views, which does not mean that the Bible plays a less important part in the life of the orthodox communities. The Romanian Orthodox Church has used the Romanian language in Church services as a liturgical language ever since the 17th century, which made it possible for everybody to access both the actual text and the interpretations of the Bible. A biblical and a liturgical tradition in the Romanian language developed early on, which allowed lay people to read the Bible in their own language. This aspect would be relevant in a bilateral dialogue between the orthodox and the evangelicals as the centrality of the Scriptures constitutes a topic of ecumenical convergence. The special place the Bible occupies in the Romanian tradition has been consolidated by the presence of a group inside the Romanian Orthodox Church called the "Lord's Army". The group has a pronounced evangelical character and although it was initially considered a separatist movement (David 1998, pp. 166–68), it eventually remained inside the Church. Within this considerably large group of orthodox Christians, the reading of the Bible occupies an important part of their church life.

Additionally, the "two source" theory, which placed the source of Divine Revelation in the Scripture and the Tradition and which had been adopted by the Romanian Orthodox Church (Negruț 1994, p. 164) was later on corrected by Dumitru Stăniloae and Dumitru Popescu, according to whom, the Source of the Revelation is the on-going work of the Son, the Word of God and of the Holy Spirit that are seen as the hands of God that reveal themselves in history (Stăniloae 1996, vol. 1, p. 32) through actions, words and images (Stăniloae 1996, vol. 1, pp. 28–29). As for the New Testament, the Word revealed Himself and, through the Holy Spirit, He was initially passed on by oral tradition and then He continued to be transmitted this way even after the books of the New Testament were written. Thus, Tradition has a wider meaning, preceding and including the Bible, which is simply the written record of the oral tradition (Popescu 2005, p. 66), but they both have one source: the Holy Trinity. This correction places both Tradition and the Scriptures within the limits of the Church and they appear to be woven into a whole through the work of the Holy Spirit.

There are of course different ways in which we can understand the authority of the Bible in the orthodox and the evangelical traditions, but the interaction between them in Romania made the Romanian orthodox biblical tradition consider the Scriptures as a criterion of validity for Tradition, while in the evangelical tradition, there are voices such as that of Dănuț Mănăstireanu that emphasize the necessity of Tradition, not just for the

purpose of preserving a Christian lifestyle, but also from the perspective of continuity (Mănăstireanu 2006, p. 55).

Thus, in the Romanian context, the Bible as an authority for faith, life and practice is an important element of ecumenical convergence. Contemporary orthodox Bible scholars identified in this area some common benefits for the two traditions. As far as "Bible literacy is concerned", the orthodox have a lot to learn from the evangelicals, if they want to make "the Gospel of Christ clearer and more central to the life of the orthodox Christians" (Tofană 2015, p. 10), while on the other side, the appeal to the patristic authority in interpreting the Scriptures would prevent personal interpretations from causing separations in the body of the Church (Tofană 2015, pp. 13–14).

5.2. The Concept of Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology in the Work of Emil Bartoș

Perhaps the most fundamental topic in Christianity is Salvation. God the Father sends His Son into the world in order to save it (John 3, 16). Since in the orthodox and evangelical theology salvation is understood differently, we must first start by asking ourselves what salvation is: the result of a unique event when a person is saved and "born again", a continuous process or both. This possible point of convergence is identified by Bartoș who offers an analysis of Stăniloae's teachings about deification, as well as about orthodox theology in general.

Bartoș notes that Stăniloae defines deification as the "man's potential experience of participation in the life of the Trinity through the help of the divine uncreated energies" (Bartoș 1997, p. 341). Deification is then expressed in a dogmatic form. "Stăniloae asserts the relationship between nature and grace and the possibility of participation in God as a fundamental insight in his theology. God created humanity's history in order to bring it to deification by His own power and will." (Bartoș 1997, pp. 341–42).

Since this process is defined simultaneously as a movement of ascent (from human being to God) and a movement of descent (from God towards human beings), Bartoș thinks that this position presents the advantage of allowing us "to speak coherently about God as transcendent, yet intimately involved with us, and about man as a personal being destined to share in the life of supreme personal existence while remaining a creature. It does so in conformity with scriptural revelation, Christian experience and tradition by showing how creation and especially human beings are distinct but not separate from God." (Bartoș 1997, p. 342).

Although Bartoș identifies in Stăniloae's work a tendency of excessive spiritualisation, and a propensity to spend more time in dialogue with tradition than with contemporaries, he still appreciates the fact that "Stăniloae has provided us with a way of speaking about man's destiny which resonates with the ethical and realistic models of deification." (Bartoș 1997, p. 342).

For Bartoș, it is thus clear that "Stăniloae's distinctive theology, besides being itself an exciting catalyst in the process of theological development, in orthodox theology in general and in Romanian orthodox theology in particular, is also very well placed to offer a normative contribution to the dialogue within contemporary theology, around his original ideas in the sphere of epistemology, anthropology, Christology, pneumatology, or ecclesiology." (Bartoș 1997, pp. 341–44).

In Building Bridges: Between the Orthodox and Evangelical Traditions, a volume dedicated to the dialogue between the orthodox and the evangelicals, Bartoș concludes that evangelical protestants are pleasantly surprised by the way in which orthodox theologians apply the concept of deification in a Christological context. To be deified means to be in the likeness of Christ and to be united with Him. Although protestant theologians such as Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Wesley, German pietists and English puritans, discussed the unification with God, the concept is understood differently in the orthodox tradition. While Protestants insist on a personal unification, a personal identification with the person of Christ, the orthodox choose the path of a mystical unification, interpreted ontologically. Personal union, Bartoș notes, is based on the experience of a personal relationship between

Christ and the believer, a relation that involves living a moral life, as the faithful is inhabited by the Holy Spirit (Bartoș 2012, pp. 48–49).

Bartoș's distinction is only partially valid, since if we examine closely this aspect, we will find several points of convergence between the two traditions. In orthodox thinking, the ontological discourse is personalist. Only on a conceptual level do we use the categories being or/and essence and person or/and hypostasis. In the orthodox world view, nature cannot be conceived as an abstract existence, it is implicitly hypostasized. That is why, even when we use ontological terms, they are used as being implicitly hypostasized in concrete personal existence. Another evangelical author who studied Stăniloae's theology, Silviu E. Rogobete, notices this and even emphasizes the fact that Stăniloae uses the term personalisation as a synonym for deification (Rogobete 2001, p. 235). In this context, personalisation refers especially to the personal relationship between the human being and Christ, a relation in which, in a sense, all other human beings are included.

Bartoș also remarks that the mystical union is meant for a spiritual elite in the orthodox Church (Bartoș 2012, p. 49), and it is somehow refused to or hard to attain by the other Christians. The observation is indeed partially correct, but it is important to mention here that theosis is not synonymous with salvation in the orthodox view, although deification does occupy a central place in orthodox soteriology. So, although the final stages of deification can only be reached by a "spiritual elite", this does not mean that those on the path to deification, even if they do not reach the final stages of perfection, have not walked the path to theosis to an extent. Grigore Moș synthetizes the orthodox teaching on theosis by identifying 5 categories of human beings: those who reach perfection, the saints, the righteous, the sinners who are saved and, finally, the sinners who are not saved (Moș 2021, sec. 3). This enumeration is, in fact, a development in a patristic key of the exchange between the young man and Jesus about salvation, the acquiring of the eternal life or of perfection (Matthew 19, pp. 16–21).

Those who have reached perfection are extremely few, perhaps one or two in a generation. They are completely purified of their passions, they have reached their human potential completely, through the works of grace in them. They are filled with grace, completely united with God, completely in the likeness of Christ, in a state of maximum deification, as much as the conditions of this world allow it. The saints, on the other hand, are the people of God through whom His work in Church or in the world is done. They are on their way to perfection/theosis, but have not made it until the very end. They are filled with grace in different degrees, and the grace in them is particularly powerful. They can be models for other people in many different ways, due to their diversity of gifts and charismas, the human condition or their social or cultural background, as well as their works through which they sanctified themselves and the world around them. They do not need to be entirely purified of their passions. There are many saints who confessed certain weaknesses or imperfections. The righteous are those who live a moral life, who are oriented towards good, but the grace of God in them does not visibly work towards the others or towards the world. Besides their goodness, morality and obvious virtues, they can have hidden sins and passions, often concerning their spiritual life. As God told Prophet Elijah, He always has His righteous people (1 Kings 19: 18) who often do not stand out through something spectacular, the way the saints do, for example. The sinners who are saved are those in whom the victory of evil is not complete, who have not entirely given up the fight or their hope, who still have their faith through which they can be saved (Hebrews 10: 38), who can get back up after they fall, who, when facing crucial decisions, choose light, even if it's on their death bed. We can hope that many people fall into this category and very few remain outside of it. As for the sinners who are not saved, not much can be said. It is a mystery and God's decision". (Moș 2021, sec. 3).

This classification offers a brief overview of the state of those saved through their faith and through a moment of personal choice to be with God, but also the dynamic of the process of deification.

While Bartoș appreciates the orthodox perspective on some of the important aspects of salvation, he also feels this perspective ignores the fact that the relation between human beings and God was completely destroyed. Eastern theology, Bartoș notes, avoids describing the human being as being in a state of total corruption so as to be able to talk about possible healing. For Bartoș, such approaches must be regarded as representing a simplistic and unfinished soteriology. That is why, he continues, the evangelicals can accept some of the orthodox theories only as being complementary to their own, but never fundamental (Bartoș 2012, p. 50).

The difference identified by Bartoș is indeed a substantial theological difference between the orthodox and the western, evangelical perspective. According to orthodox theology, through Adam's fall, human nature was altered, but it was not completely destroyed. There is in fact a difference here, as orthodox theology discusses the consequences of Adam's fall on an ontological level, while evangelical theology focuses on human beings' relationship with God. So, there is no contradiction per se. From an orthodox perspective, just like from an evangelical perspective, the fall did lead to the destruction of the relation with God and that is why the restoration of the human being could only be done by God Himself. However, orthodox theology avoids using the idea of complete destruction when referring to human nature. If human nature is destroyed, then this would result in the transformation of human nature into something else or would lead to its disappearance. It is as if existence would turn into nonexistence. Thus, with some terminological clarifications, we can find points of convergence in this field as well.

Theosis understood as perichoresis by Bartoș opens up, in Corneliu C. Simuț's opinion, four possible pathways for dialogue between Baptists and orthodox. The first one would consist of the "acknowledgement that the doctrine of deification, in its Greek Patristic and Eastern Orthodox formulations, is inspired by scripture." (Simuț 2021, p. 125). The second way would be related to the willingness of both traditions to discuss more controversial doctrines. For example, "baptists should be ready and willing to delve into the complexity of deification and Eastern Orthodox should be equally ready and willing to investigate the validity of justification as instrumental for salvation." (Simuț 2021, p. 125). The third way would be to thoroughly understand how certain fundamental concepts, such as perichoresis, are being used by the opposite tradition (Simuț 2021, p. 125). A fourth pathway would be "that both parties should be aware of the "delicate balance" the dialogue needs to keep between scripture, tradition, Christian experience, the logic and dynamics of philosophical systems, and their own presuppositions." (Simuț 2021, p. 126). Thus, in Simuț's view, Bartoș's understanding of theosis as perichoresis "can realistically become a major locus for the theological encounter between Baptists and Eastern Orthodox in the years to come, precisely because deification links anthropology with soteriology" (Simuț 2021, p. 126).

Furthermore, Bartoș mentions that many of the Christological elements one encounters in the orthodox tradition are highly appreciated by the evangelicals, especially the centrality of Christ in salvation, the unity, His divinity and humanity, His role in the life of the Church or in the life of the faithful. Another one of his remarks concerns the fact that orthodox theology prefers to consider incarnation as the most significant moment in the divine revelation, the one that fundamentally determines the way in which Christian soteriology is understood. By placing such emphasis on the human nature of the Son, Bartoș adds, the manger becomes the focal point rather than cross, the emphasis is on Bethlehem, not on Golgotha. Although the evangelical theologian agrees that Jesus recapitulated in Himself the entire humanity in order to restore it, he still points to the fact that in the gospel these elements that are indeed part of the salvation process are nevertheless secondary. The peak of Christ's life is to be found on the cross, not in the manger. Christ did not come to solve the tensions that resulted from a fallen nature, but to die so that we can be reconciled with God, so that we can receive forgiveness for our sins and a new life from above (Bartoș 2012, pp. 48–51).

Although the points emphasised by Bartoș are valid, I think we can still reach a point of convergence for the topics mentioned. Extremely helpful from this point of view is a chapter entitled "What did Bethlehem and Golgotha bring?", from Dumitru Stăniloae's Jesus Christ and the restoration of the human being. Stăniloae explains that, through the incarnation, God came into our closest proximity for eternity, while through His death on the cross and through His resurrection he freed us from our spiritual death, He raised us up to a state in which we can find communion with Him. The basis for this communion was put through His incarnation. His sacrifice has such power that it breaks us free from our spiritual numbness, it shows us the way out of this dull existence to a place where we can meet Him as God. This is what a new life means. The Cross is thus a natural consequence, the final step of God's love towards human beings. Through the cross, God's communion with us is perfected (Stăniloae 1993, p. 97). Thus, through His saving work, which begins with His incarnation, continues with His death on the Cross, His resurrection, then His ascension to heaven, He deifies the entire human nature in Himself. In our worldly life, a person's deeds have repercussions on those around us. One can perhaps create an institution, formulate a doctrine or produce a work of art, and all of these can influence the lives of others. But Christ does not save us through works or deeds separated from His being, but through a saving work in which His person is present. It is not Christ's death or resurrection, as independent acts, that constitute the centre of Apostle Paul's theology, but Christ the Crucified and the Risen One, because His deeds cannot be separated from His person (Popescu 2005, p. 223).

John Behr, for example, offers a meditation about the dimensions and the implications of the fact that Christ shows us what it means to be God by the way that He dies on the Cross as a human being, and simultaneously showing us what it means to be truly human. The words He says on the Cross—"It is finished" (John 19, 30)—are interpreted as the end of the act of creation of the human being. In Genesis 1, 26, God says "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" and then, on the Cross, He says "It is finished". That is when creation is complete, so the Cross is the central event (Behr 2018, pp. 20–21).

Thus, as we see, Bartoș's analysis of the notion of deification in orthodox theology opens up the possibility of a dialogue with evangelical theology, since soteriology offers great potential when it comes to finding points of ecumenical convergence.

5.3. The Perichoretic Model of the Church in the Work of Dănuț Mănăstireanu

Ecclesiology is an important aspect of orthodox theology. Additionally, whether one belongs or not to the Church seems to play an important part in the ecumenical dialogue. Obviously, what constitutes the limits of the Church is a topic intensely discussed even among orthodox theologians. Although they have not reached an agreement, we do know that the Great Council of Crete from 2016 accepts "the historical name of other non-orthodox Christian Churches and Confessions that are not in communion with her" (Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World 2016, p. 6). As far as the orthodox communities are concerned, although there are certain local accents, the ecclesiology is unitary and the visible element that consecrate the unity of the Church is the Eucharistic communion, the sharing of the same chalice for the members of different local orthodox churches. On the other hand, in the evangelical tradition, the importance of the local churches is so high that it is difficult to find a voice that speaks for all the evangelicals (Bunaciu 2012, p. 115).

I will limit the scope of the article to the Romanian context and, for this purpose, I will analyse Mănăstireanu's approach to ecclesiology in the orthodox and the evangelical traditions. His position, by his own account, is rather difficult: "As an ecumenical evangelical, I was always getting caught in the crossfire—from the orthodox side, for being an evangelical (meaning sectarian and schismatic, if not an outright heretic); from the evangelical side, for being ecumenical (meaning confused and ready to compromise with the "enemy"). Even so, I am convinced that, as an evangelical living in a predominantly orthodox environment, I have the unique opportunity of developing a contextual evangelical

theology in dialogue with this ancient Christian tradition. Furthermore, I believe that no other area in evangelical theology is more in need of a fresh perspective than ecclesiology. I am convinced that without this, in spite of its present expansion, evangelicalism will have no future" (Mănăstireanu 2012, p. 11).

When discussing Stăniloae's ecclesiology, Mănăstireanu proposes as a basis for the analysis the Trinitarian perichoresis and he motivates his choice as follows: "Being an icon of the Holy Trinity, the Church is called to reflect in her spatiotemporal reality, in Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit, the dynamic relationships existing eternally between the divine persons, as described by the concept of trinitarian perichoresis." Mănăstireanu then discusses several implications that follow from this. Firstly, since she exists in history, the Church is not yet perfect. Secondly, since the Church is an image of the Holy Trinity, she is called to prolong the relation of communion at the level of the Christian community. Thirdly, the Church extends in the community the ontological unity of the Trinity, but also the "functional asymmetry" of the divine persons. Therefore, "a Church reflecting this model can be neither strictly and rigidly hierarchical, nor radically egalitarian. Moreover, such an understanding will exclude a view of the true Church as consisting merely of the clergy, with the role of laity thereby reduced to the state of mere passive onlookers." (Mănăstireanu 2012, pp. 127–28).

The perichoretic model applied by Mănăstireanu to Stăniloae's ecclesiology allowed the highlighting of the eschatological dimension of the Church, her relationship with the world and the complementarity of the laity and the clergy in Church.

Still, in orthodox theology, we speak of an inaugurated eschatology, not one that has been fulfilled. That being said, the idea that orthodox spirituality encourages indifference towards life in this world is not supported. Rather, orthodox spirituality encourages us to avoid what Stăniloae calls "a premature eschatologism" (Stăniloae 2002, p. 30). Failing to creatively assume history and the world leads to a disembodied ecclesiology, an ecclesiology that no longer embraces the world the way it is, imperfect and fallen, but tries to recreate an imagined perfect kingdom here on earth, which although appears to be motivated by religious ideas, falls more into the realm of ideology. There are many religious groups concerned with making the world a better place and who are willing to resort to violence for this purpose. They are, in a way, the effect of adopting an optimistic eschatology. The orthodox ecclesiology proposes an inaugurated eschatology, to which we relate prophetically, and which can be applied in mission in general, in the ecumenical dialogues among various Christian communities, as well as in the Christian witness in a postmodern world (Sonea 2020, p. 76), in the sense that we must live as if we have already been integrated into the Kingdom of God, but not fully, and so we apply a prophetic diakrisis on the entire human life, both on a personal level or the level of the community, seeing the world through a Christian filter.

When analysing Stăniloae's ecclesiology, Mănăstireanu notices a contextual element he considers relevant in the effort to identify points of ecumenical convergence: the fact that all Romanian Christians, regardless of their confession, suffered under the communist regime and because of the effects of the Marxist ideology, which are still very much present in the Romanian society: "the ecclesial community is rooted in a Christological understanding of the human person as "the image of Christ" . . . this is particularly important in a post-communist context, where the dignity of the human person still suffers from having been systematically undermined by the previously dominant collectivistic Marxist ideology." (Mănăstireanu 2012, p. 294).

Mănăstireanu also offers a few critical remarks regarding Stăniloae's ecclesiology. He identifies a certain deficiency in the life of the Orthodox Church: "Orthodoxy in general, he notes, have not been able to formulate practical guidelines for the application of the ecclesiology that they promote" (Mănăstireanu 2012, p. 296). The observation is valid and perhaps a good example can be considered the current crisis from Ukraine, where the Ecumenical Patriarchy has recognized the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which later led to the Russian Orthodox Church breaking the communion with the churches

that have officially recognised the orthodox Church of Ukraine. Furthermore, the principle of conciliarity remains suspended at the superior level of the Church hierarchy, although both from a theological and a statutory standpoint, there are enough arguments that laity should be involved in the decision-making process (see: Statutul pentru organizarea și funcționarea Bisericii Ortodoxe Române 2020, p. 90). However, we must note here that, unlike other Orthodox Churches, the Romanian Orthodox has a long tradition of involving laity in the life of the Church, starting with the 19th century metropolitan of Transylvania, Andrei Şaguna (see: Schneider 2008).

In Mănăstireanu's view, an important point of convergence for the two traditions would be the role of Christ and of the Holy Spirit in ecclesiology. He notes that Stăniloae, for example, keeps a balance between the roles of the Two, while in catholic and protestant ecclesiology, there is often an imbalance (inclining towards Christology for Catholics and towards pneumatology for protestants) (Mănăstireanu 2012, p. 264). That is why, Mănăstireanu agrees with Stăniloae's Trinitarian ecclesiology and considers it a good model for all Christian traditions: "Given its Trinitarian coherence and measure of balance, Stăniloae's doctrine of the Church constitutes a model worth following (albeit in a critical manner) not only by younger orthodox ecclesiologists, but also by ecclesiologists from other Christian traditions, including evangelicalism" (Mănăstireanu 2012, p. 298).

This conclusion fits with that of the orthodox theologian Viorel Coman who notes that "Staniloae's Trinitarian theology is extremely relevant for the doctrine of the Church, for his balanced ecclesiological synthesis between Christology and pneumatology was constructed in light of the eternal relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit in the Trinity". In Coman's view, Staniloae's understanding of the inseparable union between the Son and the Holy Spirit guided his understanding of the unity between Christology and pneumatology in the history of salvation and ecclesiology. Thus, Coman sees Staniloae as a unique voice among Orthodox theologians "who articulated a synthesis between the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in the life and spirituality of the Church. That being so, the Romanian theologian's ecclesiology avoids the criticism related to the practical implications of the strict monopatrist model of the Trinity." (Coman 2019, p. 266).

6. Conclusions

The Romanian orthodox and evangelicals seem to have found common ground by adopting similar positions in the debates concerning moral issues that take place in today's public space. However, unless it is doubled by a serious theological dialogue which deals with deeper matters, this common ground risks remaining a superficial one.

Although the gap between the two traditions is generally perceived as wide, the fact that in the Romanian Orthodox Church we find groups such as the Lord's Army, with a pronounced evangelical character, shows that there is room for living the faith in different ways, which is encouraging from the perspective of future dialogue with the evangelicals. Still, in order to do this, first, the wounds of the past must be healed and then the two communities must be willing to be honest and open with each other and they must truly desire to learn about each other.

Identifying topics of ecumenical convergence such as the ones discussed above can constitute a platform for future official dialogue. All the theological issues that divide the two traditions must be boldly approached and discussed.

Although ecumenical dialogues can take various forms, such as a dialogue of Christian love or spirituality, a dialogue concentrated on theological matters and so on, due to the way the Orthodox Church is organized as a whole, having a synodal structure, both locally and on a panorthodox level, it is desirable that all these forms of dialogue should be accompanied by an official ecumenical dialogue as well. Having an official dialogue would not only allow a representative of the orthodox community to become more involved in the ecumenical encounters, but it would also make the reception of the results of these encounters easier at the community level. Without such a formal decision to start an official

dialogue, the encounters remain casual and contextual, and the reception will be limited to the direct participants.

On a more practical level, the orthodox and the evangelicals can and should cooperate in their missionary work in society. In order to be able to do this, they need to learn more about each other and this can only happen if they receive healthy ecumenical education in the theological schools. Pastors and priests must be encouraged to learn about the differences and similarities between the two Christian communities and they should be open to conversation when the opportunity occurs. Finally, missionary work must be carried out ethically, avoiding proselytism, as well as persecution and intolerance from both sides.

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Article

From the Ivory Tower to the Grass Roots: Ending Orthodox Oppression of Evangelicals, and Beginning Grassroots Fellowship

George Hancock-Stefan * and SaraGrace Stefan

Palmer Theological Seminary, Eastern University, St Davids, PA 19087, USA; saragrace.stefan@temple.edu
* Correspondence: ghancock@eastern.edu

Abstract: When considering the relationship between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Church, can we both celebrate progress towards unity, while acknowledging where growth must still occur? Dr. George Hancock-Stefan, who fled the oppressive communist regime of Yugoslavia with the rest of his Baptist family, now frequently returns to Eastern Europe to explore topics of modern theology. During these travels, he has recognized a concerning trend: the religious unity and interfaith fellowship celebrated in Western academia does not reach the Eastern European local level. This is primarily due to the fact that Orthodoxy is a top to bottom institution, and nothing happens at the local level unless approved by the top. This lack of religious unity and cooperation at the local level is also due to the fact that the Eastern Orthodox Church claims a national Christian monopoly and the presence of Evangelicals is considered an invasion. In this article, Dr. Hancock-Stefan unpacks the history of the spiritual revivals that took place in various Eastern Orthodox Churches in the 19th–20th centuries, as well as the policies established by the national patriarchs after the fall of communism that are now jeopardizing the relationship between Orthodox and Evangelicals. By addressing this friction with candor and Christian love, this article pleads for the Orthodox Church to relinquish its monopoly and hopes that both Orthodox and Evangelicals will start considering each other to be brothers and sisters in Christ.

Keywords: Romania; Orthodoxy; interfaith; Evangelicalism; Serbia; spiritual revivals; Protestantism; Neo-Protestantism; Department of Religion

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1. Introduction

In 2010, Reverend Dr. Eddie Glaude shocked African American churches by writing an essay entitled, "The Black Church Is Dead." In the article, Glaude articulates three reasons for making his inflammatory statement:

(1) First, black churches have always been complicated spaces.
(2) Second, African American communities are much more differentiated.
(3) Thirdly, and this is the most important point, we have witnessed *the routinization of black prophetic witness*.

As to be expected, hundreds of people responded by evaluating, critiquing, and criticizing the article (Fluker 2016). Although–or perhaps because–his points were debated so vehemently, Glaude's article served as a clarion call for the Black Church. By speaking candidly about what was and was not working, the Church was able to clearly identify what work needed to be done for the Black Church to grow stronger as a community.

Similarly, in the hope that a candid critique can lead to growth, this article will make a statement that may also lead to visceral reactions in its readers: the Eastern Orthodox Church has become an oppressive church. The ecumenical gatherings held among theologians do not eliminate the oppression that occurs at the ground level.[1] (Jemna and Mănăstireanu 2021).

This research will start on a broad level, considering the spiritual revivals that have taken place in countries where the majority of residents are Orthodox. The study will be limited to Serbia and Romania, with few references to Russia, Bulgaria, and Greece. The author is aware that there are followers of Orthodoxy in many other nations (Namee 2020). According to Matthew Namee (2020) article, ten countries make up 89% of all the Orthodox believers, including Russia, Ukraine, Romania, and Greece, among others.

This article will be focused primarily on the local level in a small region of Serbia, called Banat (within Vojvodina). This area is populated by Serbs, Romanians, and Hungarians. It is an area of 10,465 mi^2 with a population of 979,119 as of 2017. More broadly, this article will look at the various spiritual revivals that have taken place and challenged the Orthodox Church. Secondly, this article will look at how the Orthodox Church reasserted itself after the fall of communism, when it became oppressive. Next we will look to the position of the Romanian Orthodox Churches as the ethnic defenders and the shapers of nationalism that affect art, music, literature, and village habits. Lastly, we will consider the historical presence of the Protestant churches and how the Romanian Orthodox Churches have responded by persecuting the Orthodox that left their village church to join these local Protestant churches. The emphasis of this research will be on the empirical evidence found in books, academic journals, and scholarly articles. This research will be further shaped by the personal experiences of the author who lives in the Orthodox-Evangelical context.

This article will review how the Eastern Orthodox Church at large (the "EOC" to save time and space; the Romanian Orthodox Church will be the "ROC"; and the Serbian Orthodox Church will be "SOC") has demonstrated its unwillingness to share space or resources with other religious groups. Furthermore, the EOC refuses to allow other denominations to evangelize and has manipulated and monopolized both the media and the political system to assert its complete control.

Going back to the initial claim that the Orthodox Church has become oppressive, the author chose the term "oppressive" with fear and trepidation because he greatly admires and loves the Eastern Orthodox Church. However, many other scholars have referred to the EOC in similarly critical terms. Thus, this article is not the first indication that there are many religious scholars and clergy who are concerned with the absence of equal religious liberty for all believers that is notable within Eastern Orthodox nations (Guglielmi 2018, 2021).

Even Baptist historian Bill Leonard refers to the oppression of the Orthodox Church in his book, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Leonard 2003).

The EOC claims that there is no need for evangelism where it is the national church, because every Orthodox is already a Christian. Nevertheless, the Eastern Orthodox Church herself evangelizes internationally in what can be called Protestant and Catholic countries, such as Italy, France, and the United States. The EOC has become so far-reaching that in 2020, Giordan published a book entitled *Global Eastern Orthodoxy* where the Church's religion, politics and human rights are studied from an international viewpoint (Giordon and Zrinscak 2020). The highly revered Metropolitan Kallistos Ware of Oxford also talks about the growing pains that the EOC experiences as it moves out of its ethnic moorings (Ware 1963, 2018). It is interesting that the EOC prevents other denominations from evangelizing but expects to receive the same religious liberties that she is not willing to give in her own countries. This perspective is unfortunately not de novo, as the 19th-century Roman Catholic church also had similar practices, claiming that "error has no rights."

The term "oppressive" has also been used to describe the Orthodox Church in a different context. Upon wondering why Russia cannot open itself to more democratic principles, the Dutch economist James Peron suggested that the Russian church is composed of two different but equally oppressive strands—Russian and Byzantine.

When pagan Russia entered the society of Christian civilization, the missionary task was accomplished by monks and priests of Eastern Orthodoxy. Absolutist traditions of government were transmitted by the new society at the same time. The Russian state

which began to be reformed in the interregnum of the Tartar invasion, grew from the fusion of two tyrannical traditions of government—Orthodox absolutism and Tartar despotism (Peron 2000). This inherited authoritarianism has been on display in the politics of Putin and the discipline given by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow in his dealings with priests and Ukraine's attempts to seek a patriarchate (Higgins 2007; Mrachek 2019).

Going back to Glaude, although he is not accusing the Black Church of being oppressive, taking the main three points from his article and applying them to the Eastern Orthodox Church leads to some thought-provoking similarities:

The authors agrees that the EOC has a highly nuanced and complicated history. Generalities are created by historians so that we can teach a subject, but nuances and complexities supply beauty.

The ethnic communities that make up Eastern Orthodox Christianity are highly differentiated. This leads to great diversified ethnic beauty, by which I mean the ways that worship is uniquely shaped by various ethnic groups' music, art, cultural wisdom, et cetera. From the angelic beauty that the ambassadors of Emperor Vladimir have heard in the churches of Byzantium, to the beauty of the icons, to the wisdom of *The Philokalia* and the theology of the Holy Trinity written across the millennia, this cultural richness is to be treasured by all Christians.

Probably no one has assessed the third point regarding routinization and witness better than the well-known church historian, Jaroslav Pelikan when he wrote: "Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And, I suppose, I should add, it is traditionalism that gives tradition a bad name" (Pelikan 1984). The Orthodox Church, by placing a greater emphasis on the past, has less to contribute to the vitality of the present. This focus on the importance of the past creates a powerful sense of nationalism as the Eastern Orthodox Church takes great pride in what it has overcome and tells any new groups that because they lack this historical connection, they cannot be considered part of the present. It is this historical, nationalistic approach that has become oppressive to anyone who comes into the national space (Djuvara 2012).

The asserted dominance of the Eastern Orthodox Church is expressed in many fashions. At the highest level, one can see that Moscow calls itself the Third Rome and claims to be the only one that is free (the first Rome is heretical, the second Rome, i.e., Constantinople, is under Islamic subjugation, especially since this past summer when Hagia Sophia became a mosque).

The dominance and intentional separation of Moscow was also visible when, after 60 years of planning for the Pan-Orthodox Meeting in Crete, the Russian Patriarch decided not to go. It is true that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church seeking independence from the Patriarchate of Moscow and the granting of that request by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew from Constantinople was a complicated issue. However, the absence of the Patriarch from the meeting showed a disregard for the immense amount of planning required for the event, as well as a lack of respect for the contributions of others. Likewise, when it comes to the concept of nationalism, the Romanian Cathedral that was dedicated in Bucharest is called The Salvation of the Nation.[2] This dedication was done despite major protests by Catholics, Protestants and Neo-Protestants.[3]

2. A Note on the Author's Personal History

Before continuing with an analysis of the Eastern Orthodox Church, the reader must understand the personal history of the author, as it sheds some light on why this subject is of such great interest. For the sake of clarity, this requires the sparing use of personal pronouns. For my entire life I have been actively involved in both the Romanian Eastern Orthodox Church and the Romanian Baptist Church. I was baptized in the Romanian Orthodox Church as an infant and was then baptized in the First Romanian Baptist Church in Detroit when I was 16. In our family we have cantors in the Romanian Orthodox Church, priests in the Orthodox Church, and Pastors in the Baptist and Nazarene Churches.[4] I have taken my children to worship in the Orthodox Church and I have sent hundreds of

my seminary students to do the same. Among my friends I am known as an evangelical ecumenist because the unity of Christ's Church is of paramount importance to me. I have written books and articles with my Orthodox brothers, and I have participated in seminars and colloquia.

Given this involvement, I do not mean that the only thing the Eastern Orthodox Church does is oppress people. Collectively with other evangelical church historians and theologians, I identify with the beliefs and many of the accomplishments of the Orthodox Church around the world. I agree in theory and practice with the first six of the seven ecumenical councils. I highly appreciate the presentation of the Word of the God so that nations that did not know the Gospel became Christians. I also agree that one of the bulwarks against the vicissitudes of the Ottoman Empire both inside the countries and on the battlefields have been the nations where the Orthodox Church was the religious leader. I also have a deep appreciation for those who have kept the Christian faith during the Communist regimes. The rise and fall of various religious and political revivals and regimes will be at the epicenter of the following section.

3. Revivals in Orthodox Churches—The Time of the Holy Spirit's Visitation

A spiritual revival is an occasion where God brings a sense of renewal or criticism to the existing church community or specific members of that church community. Those members then respond by inspiring correction within the church or by being pushed out by the majority who do not want to adjust or change their ways. By reflecting on these historical revivals, starting with the visitation to the Israelites by Jesus Christ and continuing through various groups, such as monastic orders, conciliarists, and Waldensians in the Middle Ages, as well as the Protestant Reformation and Counter-Reformation in the sixteenth century, and different Charismatic revivals in the twentieth century, I will highlight how the Eastern Orthodox Church has historically responded to spiritual revivals among her own people.[5] (The Orthodox Church in America 2013).

The majority of those who have criticized the Church are frequently pushed out of the community. This historical background will further support the claim that the Eastern Orthodox Church does initially welcome and seek to align potential revivals with herself, but later attempts to change the focus of the revival if it does not align with the Church's teachings. Then, if the leaders of the revival do not comply with this alignment, they are oppressed, marginalized, and finally, excommunicated.

Based on historical research, I am of the opinion that churches settle in and then get atrophied until God sends the Holy Spirit to revive the church. When spiritual revivals happen, they have their excesses, but they also add new life to the existing church if they are not pushed to the periphery or declared heretical. Although the Eastern Orthodox Church is hesitant to embrace change, the EOC is historically very aware of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.[6]

Certain spiritual revivals are extremely well-known beyond denominational lines, such as the Pietistic Movement and the Methodist Revivals of Europe, the spiritual awakenings of the United States from 1720–1740, and 1780–1870, and the Pentecostal Revivals such as that of Azusa, California, the Charismatic Movement, and the Vineyard movement. The spiritual revivals that occurred within the Orthodox church are less known. Thus, church historians and revivalists are indebted to Aleksandra Djurić-Milovanović and Radmila Radic who in 2017 published their impressive book entitled *Orthodox Christian Renewal in Eastern Europe* as a part of a larger series entitled *Christianity and Renewal—Interdisciplinary Studies*. From this seminal study we can see that almost every ethnic group in the family of Eastern Orthodox Churches have been visited by the Holy Spirit in various ways. As can be expected, a large portion of the book analyzes the many movements of the Holy Spirit in Russia and Ukraine, followed by different movements of the Holy Spirit among the Serbs, Romanians, Bulgarians, and Greeks.

This article will focus on two of these movements: the Romanian Lord's Army movement and the Serbian God Worshipper Movement. While the Orthodox Church had an

opportunity to grow through revival in these instances, it instead chose to marginalize these movements and push out their proponents. The Orthodox Church responded similarly to other revivals but, for the sake of time, we will just explore the aforementioned two.

In Romania at the end of World War I there was a lot of excitement because what was long known as the desire of Romanians, the One Great Romania had been established. Now that all the Romanians were together in one country there was also time to assess the spiritual reality of this newly formed nation that was nationally Romanian Orthodox.

In this post-World War I period, there were three Romanian Orthodox priests who sought to deepen the spirituality in the ROC. All three of them were young, were assigned to churches after they completed their seminary training, and became remarkable at preaching the full Gospel, which they believed the entire ROC needed to hear. They did not want to leave the church—they wanted to see the church revived. These three priests were Dumitru Cornilescu (1891–1975), also known as the translator of the Bible in modern Romanian; Tudor Popescu (1882–1963), also known as the preacher of the new life in Christ; and Iosif Trifa (1888–1938), known as the founder of the Lord's Army (*Oastea Domnului* in Romanian).

Cornilescu came from a family of priests and decided to become a priest himself. While in the seminary, he found that he loved languages and translated many religious works into Romanian from English, German, and French. When he became a priest, he found out that people did not know the Bible and the existing Bible was difficult to understand; however, he believed that the Orthodox people would only change through direct access to the Bible. As Cornilescu was translating the Bible, he had a conversion experience and wrote the pamphlet, "How I Came Back to God and How I Started to Tell Others about It." However, as Cornilescu told others about his experience, he came to realize that there was a great difference between how he viewed the Bible and how the Orthodox Church saw the Bible. The ROC saw the Bible as the book of the institution, while Cornilescu saw it as a book for the people. His new translation was published in 1921 and he continued to hold Orthodox liturgical services, but also organized small groups for studying the Bible. Over five million copies of Cornilescu's Bible as it became known were printed by the British & Foreign Bible Society. In response, the Orthodox Church rejected Cornilescu's Bible by calling it the Protestant Bible.

Despite this rejection, Cornilescu's Bible inspired one of his colleagues to start reading the Bible. Tudor Popescu started to preach, and he became a phenomenal preacher in Bucharest. Thousands would come to hear him preach in a church known as The Stork's Nest. In collaboration with Cornilescu, Popescu started a journal called *Adevărul Creștin* (The Christian Truth) in which they analyzed the Orthodox Dogma and called people to develop personal relationships with God. It is because of their preaching and this theological work that both Cornilescu and Popescu were excommunicated from the Romanian Orthodox Church in 1924.

After Popescu's excommunication, he started a house church movement and the attendants were called "Tudorists," after the first name of Popescu. When the Communists came, they forced this group to join the Brethren Church where they were welcomed to keep their specific practices, among which was the infant's baptism. Thus, today Popescu's "Tudorists" practice both adult and infant baptism as a result of the merger with the Brethren movement.[7]

As a teacher and priest, Trifa became aware of the distance that the village people had from God and the Bible, and he also noted that the parishioners' lifestyles were pretty pagan as they repeatedly passed by him on their way to and from the bar. In his writings, Trifa confessed that he graduated from seminary without knowing the Bible; however, once he started to study it, he shared it with his parishioners. In 1921, Metropolitan Nicolae Balan called Trifa to be the chaplain of the Orthodox Theological Seminary at Sibiu and the editor of a weekly publication called "The Light of the Village" (Constantineanu 2017). In this publication, Trifa gained a national audience in which he preached on Christian life and asked why the Orthodox Church was silent regarding so many sinful practices. In

1923 he published a call asking those who wanted to be the followers of Christ to respond to this invitation. This invitation concluded with these words:

> "Ahead of our army is the Savior Christ, and He will lead us to victory.
>
> Asking my Savior Jesus Christ to help me fight in his Army, I sign this decision that was made for my good and my salvation."

On Easter in 1924, Trifa published the first list of people who wanted to follow Christ and they became known as the soldiers of the Lord's Army. For the next two decades Trifa and other leaders from the Lord's Army sought to define what the religious group was. Trifa and the Lord's Army continued to worship in the Orthodox Church and Trifa never challenged the ROC's liturgy or the icons. The soldiers of the Lord's Army were faithfully present in the Orthodox Church and in their local gatherings. Their four main theological principles were: The Crucified Christ, the struggle against sin, the moral and ethical renewal which come from a relationship with Christ, and an emphasis on lay people's voluntary involvements.

At the same time, they placed great emphasis on daily activities which included: the daily life of a Christian which is a daily sermon for all to see, acts of mercy, love and prayer, forgiveness and suffering, and the distribution of Christian literature.

Eventually Trifa was excommunicated on 4 April 1937, from the ROC priesthood, but he declared that he and the Lord's Army would never leave the Romanian Orthodox Church because the Lord's Army was a movement within and of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Despite this relationship, the ROC disagreed with Trifa regarding salvation through Christ versus salvation through the Church and Trifa's insistence that the leadership of the Lord's Army had to always be in the hands of laity, not the ROC priests.

When Trifa died in 1938, the Metropolitan Balan who invited him to be the leader in 1923, sent a delegation to unrobe him of his priestly vestments before he was buried. The Lord's Army nevertheless continued under the leadership of Traian Dorz (1914–1989) who was called by Trifa to be his assistant in 1929[8] (Dowley 2015; MacCulloch 2003; Woodbridge and James 2013; Noll 2001; Shelley and Shelley 2021). The tension between the Lord's Army and the Orthodox Church continues in the 21st century, but the Lord's Army continues to withstand this tension and produce great spiritual leaders among both the laity and current and future priests. In Djurić-Milovanović's *Orthodox Christian Renewal in Eastern Europe*, Mircea Maran shows that the Lord's Army was as influential in Banat, Serbia as it was in Romania. In Banat almost every village had a Lord's Army group that faithfully attended both the liturgy in the local Orthodox Church and the gatherings of the Lord's Army (Maran 2017).

One wonders what would have happened to the Romanian Orthodox Church if they would have allowed Cornilescu, Popescu, and Trifa to continue the work which they felt that God was calling them to do in the Romanian Orthodox Church. What would have happened if the new emphases they brought into the Church, such as the reading of the Bible, a deeper relationship with God, and a greater involvement of the laity would have been internalized, not rejected? (Clark 2018).

Similar to the revival that the Romanian Orthodox Church experienced through the Lord's Army, the Serbian Orthodox Church experienced revivals through the Nazarene Movement and the God Worshipper Movement.

The first group that challenged the SOC was in the second half of the 19th century. The Nazarenes came to Serbia and were initially well received, but that reception changed within a decade. In 1872, *Orthodoxy*, a Serbian language newspaper was full of praise for the Nazarenes' charity, modesty, friendliness, naturalness, and decency. Especially noted was their respect for the elderly and their strict adherence to the Ten Commandments. By late 1880, however, the situation had changed and the numerous Orthodox Serbs converting to become Nazarene provoked unanimous hostility from the SOC. The initial backlash was in the forms of mockery and jokes; however, the jokes were replaced with panic and

the Nazarenes were eventually compared to a cholera epidemic (Djurić-Milovanović and Radic 2017).

In some villages the conversions were numerous, such as the case of Bavaniste, Banat where 108 families left the Serbian Orthodox Church to become members of the local Nazarene Church (Djurić-Milovanović and Radic 2017). In the 1880s, the Serbian prelates started to argue that Nazarenes were heretics, and that the Orthodox faith was innate to the Serbian people, however the congregants and intellectuals who remained loyal to the SOC challenged the church by stating that the attraction of the Nazarene movement was the reading and the preaching of the Bible so that the lay people could understand it.

Under the leadership of Jaša Tomíc, the Serbian Radical Party started telling the SOC to adopt the tactics of the Nazarenes at the village level in order to keep the parishioners within the Serbian Orthodox Church and to further solidify the national consciousness against potential Magyarization (Djurić-Milovanović and Radic 2017). Other politicians, such as Djoka Iovanovic, asked for the Nazarenes to be expelled from Serbia, which fortunately did not happen.

In the battle against the Nazarenes, the Serbian Orthodox Church responded to some of the intellectuals' criticisms and, by copying what the Nazarenes did, they became more attentive to the needs of the people. As a result, the liturgy of the SOC was translated into the vernacular so that the people could understand. The Serbian Orthodox Church also eventually adopted Vuk Karadzic's translation of the New Testament, which had been completed in 1847 but was rejected by the Church until 1868, when it was printed and distributed among the priests and people.

While the Nazarenes had a Protestant doctrine which was distinctive from the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Bogomoljci or God Worshippers (this is not the same as the medieval dualist group), developed an independent life from the Church but continued to consider themselves Orthodox and practiced Orthodox doctrine. The God Worshippers were initially illiterate but learned to read and write out of their love for the Bible. The local Serbian Bishop of Banat and Backa excoriated the God Worshipers. He was afraid that soon they would become sectarians such as the Nazarenes. However, the greater danger lay in the fact that the Bogomoljci interpreted the Bible and tried to establish a set of moral norms apart from the Church, which for Dimitrijevic should have a monopoly in both (Djurić-Milovanović and Radic 2017).

The two fears of the Serbian prelates in assessing the Bogomoljci's piety was that they might eventually abandon Orthodoxy and more importantly, Serbdom. Other leaders such as Bishop Nikolaj Velimirovic, who himself brought changes in the Serbian Orthodox Church wrote, "Try to understand the Bogomoljka. Refrain from throwing stones at them, you might easily hit Christ himself. Do not reject them so that they do not reject you" (Djurić-Milovanović and Radic 2017).

Like Velimirovic, some priests welcomed the Bogomoljka because of their enthusiasm and singing while others remained embarrassed by their excessive enthusiasm, spiritual in-discipline, and visions. In these conflicting situations with other bishops, Velimirovic directed the God Worshippers into monastic orders, and together the monks and the peasants who started to attend monasteries created a movement called Svetosavlje.

Velimirovic spent part of his formative education in the West and returned to Serbia as an enthusiastic advocate for religious revival in Orthodoxy. He spoke of Christianity as alive and changing. He also combined Christianity and nationalism, writing, "If I am for Christ, then I have to help my oppressed people liberate themselves." Because of his Christian views and nationalism, Velimirovic and his writings were banned during the Communist regimes. In 1990 however, he was celebrated as Serbian's greatest churchman and was canonized in 2002.

Radic writes succinctly about the God Worshippers Movement, saying that it "revived religious life in Serbia in the interwar period"; "contributed to the spread of the religious press"; and "revitalized the monastic movement" (Djurić-Milovanović and Radic 2017, p. 158). Despite these contributions, the gatherings of God Worshippers in the beginning

of the Communist regime were forbidden and the press would report where they came together. The Bishop of Banja Luka wrote that he would prevent their influence from growing in the region where he served. It seems he was successful, as in the 1980s, the Church tried to find out how many God Worshippers were left but concluded that the movement was over. They formed a new program for involving people in the church, but the emphasis was not on being religious, but how much they were ready to fight for the interest of the Church and Serbianism ((Djurić-Milovanović and Radic 2017, p. 160).

The basic principles of the movement emphasized strict personal morality, the importance of reading the Scriptures, and the significance of praying and singing hymns. However, the God Worshippers were willing to stay in the Serbian Orthodox Church while the Nazarenes were not. The SOC was uneasy with the God Worshippers—they wanted the movement to be a part of the church, but when they tried to control it, the God Worshippers wanted their liberty. Indeed, one can argue that for the duration of the movement, they were the missionary arm of the church—experiencing revival and encouraging many people to come back to the Mother Church. Nevertheless, like any movement, for the God Worshippers there were only the following options: they could become a part of the entity that they wanted to help, namely the church where they started; they could become an independent body or denomination; or they could disappear. It seems that the God Worshippers Movement in the Serbian Orthodox Church has indeed disappeared.

As with the Lord's Army Movement in the Romanian Orthodox Church, we are wondering what would have happened to the Serbian Orthodox Church if more priests would have welcomed the God Worshipper Movement in their parishes. What would have happened if the new emphases they brought such as the reading of the Bible, a deeper relationship with God, and a greater involvement of the laity would have been internalized, not rejected?

Is there something in the structure of the Church that is not willing or capable to accept newness or challenge? Is there a possibility that a theology that declares the newness of the redeemed person in Christ and the fact that the mercies of the Lord are new every morning, has closed the windows and the doors of the church to anything new?

While the spiritual newness brought by the sons and daughters of the Church was rejected, the newness that was brought by Protestants and Neo-Protestants was met with systematic persecution from both the Eastern Orthodox Church and the government. That is the subject to which we will turn next.

4. The Orthodox Gaining Control after the Fall of Communism

The majority of church historians agree that there were no Protestant Churches in Eastern Orthodox countries before the middle of the 19th century.[9] This means that the Eastern Orthodox Church considers that every Bulgarian, Greek, Romanian, Russian, or Ukrainian could not be any religion or denomination but Orthodox. To be ethnically Russian was to be Orthodox and to be Orthodox was to be ethnically Russian. However, good history challenges us to talk about the presence of Protestants in these countries; they did exist under the radar, and they were known as ethnic Protestant Churches. The presence of these ethnic Protestant churches is extremely important to the Neo-Protestants, as it confirms their historical legitimacy, versus Orthodox claims that the Neo-Protestants have no roots in Eastern Europe.

Despite national claims, towards the end of the 18th century there were already Mennonites in Russia, German Lutherans, and Reformed Hungarians in Romania and Serbia. These churches agreed that they were specifically for the ethnic groups that were founded in these territories and little evangelism, or proselytism, was done towards the local residents. The few people that did convert to these non-Orthodox churches became a part of these ethnic congregations and sometimes married into those churches. The evangelical churches or what are now called Neo-Protestants (Baptists, Pentecostals, Plymouth Brethren, Seventh Day Adventists, etc.) started to come into Orthodox countries

in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Initially when the Baptists came to Eastern Europe and Russia they started evangelizing with the other ethnic groups such as Germans, Hungarians, Slovaks, but within a couple of years they started churches with the local people. The person who started this fantastic trend was Johannes Oncken, from Hamburg, Germany whose motto was "Every Baptist a missionary and every place a Baptist mission field." During his lifetime he organized Baptist Churches in almost every capital city of Europe (Leonard 2003, pp. 307–37).

The main distinction between the Protestant Churches and the Neo-Protestant Churches in Orthodox countries is that the Protestant Churches rarely tried to evangelize the native people—they kept to themselves. The Neo-Protestants were not an ethnic group, but an international group. While Lutherans in Eastern Europe and Russia are ethnically German, the Neo-Protestants evangelized the Orthodox or, to use a phrase from Miroslav Volf, "they fished in the Orthodox pond" (Volf 1996).

As the Neo-Protestants became established in Serbia and Romania during the first half of the 20th century, they were called many accusatory names by almost everyone who saw them. They were called American spies (because Baptist and Pentecostal missionaries were from America), they were called Communists because they had many concerns for the poor and the working class, and they were called ethnic traitors because they had left Orthodoxy, the religion of the ethnic group. Patriotism ran high during World War II and all the Romanian Baptist Churches were closed for a couple of years. This decree was done by the government at the request of the Orthodox Church, which felt that they could use the opportunity to get rid of the Neo-Protestants, who they accused of being unpatriotic.

It is true that during the time of Communism in Eastern Europe (1945–1990) and in Russia (1917–1990), many of the Christians, but especially Christian leaders were persecuted, tortured, imprisoned, and killed. There are stories of Christian suffering that parallel the Patristic times and John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*. Church history records hundreds and thousands of martyrs, but the millions are only known by the Lord. Some missiologists argue that the 20th century, primarily in communist lands, begat more martyrs than the previous 19 centuries put together. While the communist regimes being atheistic imprisoned anyone (or any religion) who opposed them, even in these times of persecution the Eastern Orthodox Church managed to retain its position of honor and prestige because many the Communist leaders came from the Orthodox Church (including Stalin, who was an Orthodox seminarian for one year).

Two more things need to be mentioned in order to clarify the situation between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Neo-Protestants. The Department of Religious Affairs was established during the reign of Communism. The minister in charge of the Department was usually an atheist comrade and his responsibilities were making sure that churches were persecuted, and seminarians and priests were harassed or turned into spies for the government, especially those who had the privilege of traveling abroad. Since the fall of Communism, the Department of Religions has continued its existence and all of its officials are members of the EOC. This department now exists in all Eastern Orthodox countries as a branch of the Patriarchate and there are no Catholics, Protestants or Neo-Protestants in it.

The second thing to mention is that the Eastern Orthodox Church does not recognize any of the evangelicals as churches, but calls them cults or sects. For example, in Romania the Department of Religion is also called the Department of Cults, and Protestants and Neo-Protestants are reduced to "sects," which in popular parlance, have a dismissive, pejorative connotation.

When the Communist regimes fell in Russia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania, the evangelicals expected an end to their persecution. The religious sphere became more accepting for about two years until the Orthodox Church asserted its power through the Russian Duma and the Parliaments of Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria (Shellnutt 2016; Silliman 2020). Laws were passed in Russia claiming that since Russia is Orthodox, other religious groups should not have the same liberty.[10] (Kohlhofer 2004) In Romania, the Patriarchate built the first Romanian Cathedral called *Mantuirea Neamului* (The Salvation

of the Nation). There were protests from the Catholic Church as it attempted to reassert its historical presence which had been eliminated during the time of Communism. This elimination was done with the help of the Orthodox Church which took over Catholic Churches and transformed them into Eastern Orthodox Churches. The Protestant Churches and the Neo-Protestant Churches also protested the name of the Cathedral, saying that the salvation of the nation was not preached only by the Romanian Church, but by all the churches that call people to Jesus. Despite these protests, the Cathedral was consecrated in November 2018 with the participation of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. At the height of 443 feet from ground to the cross, it is the tallest Orthodox Cathedral in the world, and it cost 125 million dollars, the majority of this money coming from the taxes of the Romanian people, whether they belong to the Romanian Orthodox Church or not.

While the ROC continues to claim its religious dominance, it also refuses to interact with other denominations or religions. For example, at the University of Bucharest in 2017, there was a celebration of the 500th year of the Protestant Reformation. The apex of the celebration was a concert with representatives from all the religious groups—Catholic, Baptist, Lutheran, Pentecostal, and the Church of the Brethren. The exception was the representation from the Orthodox Church which, by its absence, declared that the other groups were not as important as the Orthodox. According to previous experiences, if something is organized by the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate, everyone is expected to come. If it is organized by another religious group, the Patriarchate will send a delegate of low standing or be completely absent.

In Romania, due to the fact that the Baptists, the Church of the Brethren, and the Pentecostals, have large denominations, with the Pentecostal Churches growing at an internationally known speed, the Patriarchate is less active in stirring persecution against the non-Orthodox. On the contrary, the Patriarchate has become highly active in renewing the popular interest for pilgrimages to monasteries and holy places, building new churches and creating the nostalgia that the Romanians are still all Orthodox, or always have been. The other aspect that has helped the Romanian Evangelicals is the post-Communist presence of Protestants and Neo-Protestants in local governments all the way to the Parliament and the President's Cabinet.

The same cannot be said to be true of Serbia where the Neo-Protestants remain in small numbers and where the Serbian Orthodox Church has passed draconian laws against them through the Parliament.

5. Continued: The Serbian Orthodox Church

In the realignment that took place after the division of the former republics of Yugoslavia and the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo, the Serbian Orthodox Church sought to consolidate its stronghold over the land. A new law was passed in April 2006 in which the religious community was divided into four categories: first, the traditional or the national church, the Serbian Orthodox Church which is also called the canonical church and has jurisprudence over the whole country. On the second level with less power and privilege are the ethnic churches. These are the Catholic Church, the Islam community, the German Lutheran Church, the Hungarian Lutheran Church, the Hungarian Reformed Church, and the Slovak Reformed Church. The idea is that these churches belong to people who are not Serbians and so they do not decrease the number of Serbian Orthodox. In the third category are the Evangelical Churches such as the Baptists, Pentecostals, Seventh Day Adventists, and Jehovah Witnesses. Not only were they placed in the third category, but they were all declared nonexistent even though Baptists existed in Yugoslavia for over 100 years. They had to apply *de novo* with one hundred signatures for each applicant church. In the fourth category are NGOS and religious organizations such as World Vision and Bread for the World.

Once this law was proposed in 2006 there were international cries from various defenders of religious freedom because Serbia did sign the United Nations and European Union agreements on religious freedom and declared that there is freedom in the country

for every religious group. The seven churches on the second tier have all the same privileges but are not at the same level of power as the Serbian Orthodox Church. These confessional churches are completely discriminated against as never before. The SOC has made it so that they have to pay residence taxes on their buildings; they have to register as though they were not a part of Serbia's history; and lastly, they are treated as for-profit companies.

Various Neo-Protestant Churches protested this law, but they lost their case before the Serbian Supreme Court in 2012. After that, they then appealed to the European Court in Strasbourg. In summary: All the historic Neo-Protestant churches were denied historic standing and told to register again even though some of them had been in Serbia close to 100 years. These churches had to be registered again and then their registration could be rejected by the Supreme Court of Serbia. These denominations appealed to the Serbian Supreme Court and lost (Vidovic 2020, 2021).

It was decided that the Baptist Church of Belgrade in the name of the Baptist Union which no longer existed, would appeal the case of these churches at the Strasbourg Court for Human Rights. The waiting period for this court is long and in the meantime the government pressured the Baptist churches and other Neo-Protestant churches to apply and become a Union again. Thus, two Baptist Unions were formed—one for the Serbians and one for the Slovaks, registered as of 2017 (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia 2021). Once the Baptist Churches accepted this new registration, the Strasbourg Court for Human Rights dismissed their appeal. Currently, only the Baptist Church of Belgrade is not registered. The four-tier category of religious groups function with all the privileges given to the Serbian Orthodox Church, fewer to the Jews, Moslems, Catholics, Lutherans, and Reformed, even less to the Neo-Protestants who are registered and then even fewer to the NGOs who function in what we in the West would call a parachurch organization.

In view of all the objections that the Serbian Orthodox Church has received from international bodies and the objections that the Serbian Parliament has received in passing this draconian law, the Serbian Orthodox Church, and the Serbian Parliament, in cooperation with the media and the police, continue to harass, persecute, and denigrate those who are not Orthodox.

This lack of legal status makes Neo-Protestants vulnerable, and violent attacks against and persecution of church members, and the deliberate destruction of church property have become everyday occurrences. Because of this oppression, the "unofficial" Serbian evangelicals have responded in three different ways: there are those who have been speaking out for the past twenty years against the injustices that have been perpetrated against them. There are those who agree that the situation is bad, but they are afraid that if they speak out, the situation will get worse. Lastly, there are those who argue that the church has historically suffered under religious persecution and then Communist persecution, and now they are being oppressed by the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Besides being witnessed firsthand, these oppressive measures have been documented by researchers from the Fuller Theological Seminary, George Fox Seminary, and Princeton Theological Seminary. Researchers have identified at least three trends amidst this oppression: the rejection of those from inside of the church who want to make corrections, those who want to work together but are neglected, and those who are in a small minority and are considered insignificant or without protection who experience the greatest oppression. To this group we turn now.

6. The Analysis of the Orthodox—Evangelical Existence at the Village Level

Now we come to the concept of the "double minority," established and described by Djurić-Milovanović in her text, *Double minorities in Serbia: the distinctive aspects of the religion and ethnicity of Romanians in Vojvodina* (Djurić-Milovanović 2015). To understand this concept, one must first understand that the northeast part of Serbia is broken into three areas—Banat, Backa and Srem. The Banat Area is populated by both Serbians and Romanians, and it is this area that Djurić-Milovanović examined, concluding that the

Romanian Evangelicals are firstly a minority because they are not Serbians, and they are secondly a minority because they are not Orthodox. This double minority status is further exacerbated by the intentional way that the Serbian government and SOC attempt to reduce non-Serbian ethnic populations and pressure the non-orthodox into returning to or joining the Orthodox church. Her historical findings have not been challenged.

In addition to the book by Djurić-Milovanović, four experiences in the author's life have contributed to his understanding of what is going on in the countries and communities that are oppressed by the Orthodox Church. These experiences are similar to those described by Djurić-Milovanović. The first event was his becoming involved in building Baptist churches in Serbia. Returning to the use of informal personal pronouns, I quickly found that registering the rebuilt and restored church was almost impossible because Baptists are no longer recognized in the nation. History had been blatantly eliminated, as I had personally attended that Baptist church from 1956 to 1965 before my family immigrated to the West. When I contacted various governmental employees about speeding the church registration process along, I received the answer that "This is Serbia and things just go slowly!" as well as the warning that I should not pressure the system because things could become even more convoluted and slow-moving.

Secondly, amidst these personal experiences that suggest oppression, there have also been glimmers of hope for a more collaborative future for the Orthodox and the Evangelicals. I attended the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation and the Celebration that was put on by the Evangelical Student Union of Serbia and Montenegro. This was run with the Orthodox Faculty of Theology and was a fantastic opportunity for fellowship and conversation. Thus, this experience confirmed my hope of broadening the dialogue with the Orthodox Church.

Thirdly, during the 500th Reformation Anniversary of 2017, while I was speaking before the Serbian Parliament, Djurić-Milovanović's book, *Double Minorities in Serbia*, served as a reference point to confirm the argument that Serbian Protestants are sidelined and marginalized. Dr. Djurić-Milovanović herself was present as a historian, scholar, and member of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Lastly, while at the 500th Anniversary, I also attended the Belgrade Book Exposition which is the second largest in Europe. While there, I saw the 2017 *Almanah* published by Libertatea (Liberty), the only Romanian newspaper in the region of Banat. I found that there was a lack of religious equality evident in the newspaper's focus on Orthodoxy. When I considered the *Almanah* which was meant to represent the culture and life of the Romanian villages, it eloquently described the things that happened in every village, paying particular attention to the Romanian Orthodox Church and its events. The introductory article of the *Almanah* was not written by the editor, but from the Orthodox Bishop who had jurisprudence over Banat, Bishop Daniil, as well as a photo of an Orthodox priest from each village. However, there was no mention of Nazarenes, Baptists, Pentecostals, Seventh Day Adventists, or Jehovah's Witnesses.

I wrote a letter to Mr. Vasile Barbu, the editor of the *Almanah*, explaining to him that when I was a child growing up in Yugoslavia, my homeroom teacher repeatedly told me that I had no future in Communist society because I was a Baptist. Even more troubling, the local Orthodox priest told me that I was not Romanian since I was not Orthodox. My reason for sharing this personal history was because at that time, my identity was denied by both the Communists and the Orthodox. According to them, Baptist Romanians did not exist, so we could not exist. I explained to Barbu that his newspaper (Barbu 2017) was perpetuating that same historical denial; I wrote that Romanian Protestants exist and have contributed to the development of village culture and asked him to share his justification for this negation of the Romanian Evangelical existence. I also recommended both of Djurić-Milovanović's books for his perusal.[11]

It is exactly because of this absence of any mention of the evangelical churches that the research provided by Djurić-Milovanović together with her colleagues Mircea Maran and Biljana Sikimic is of superlative importance. Their first book, *Rumunske Verske Zajednice u*

Banatu (The Assemblies of the Romanian Believers in Banat) published in 2011 presents incontestable historical documentation that the Greek Catholics as well as the Neo-Protestants such as Adventists, Baptists, Nazarenes, and Pentecostals existed in Serbia at the beginning of the 20th century. By the middle of the 20th century there were Neo-Protestant Churches that had over 300 members, such as the Nazarene Church in Lokve, or the Romanian Baptist Churches in Vladimirovac and Nikolinti that had close to 100 members (Djurić-Milovanović et al. 2011).

In the conclusion of *Double Minorities in Serbia,* Djurić-Milovanović writes:

> "The neo-Protestant Romanians provide a paradigmatic example of looking into the complex relationship between key elements of identity—ethnicity, language, and religion. The study of the four neo-Protestant communities to which Romanians of Vojvodina belong has shown that the ultimate ethnic and religious identities in those communities is more complex than in the case of Orthodox Romanians where religion is a reliable indicator of ethnic." (Djurić-Milovanović and Radic 2017)

Additionally, in contrast with Barbu's 2017 almanac in which there is no sign of any evangelical churches in the area, Djurić-Milovanović lists 15 villages where there are Nazarenes, Adventists, Baptists, or Pentecostals.

Now that the consistent presence of Evangelicals has been established, we have to return to the way they are treated. What makes the Eastern Orthodox Church behave oppressively in a century that seeks to be more open, or to paraphrase Paul who says, "I have opened my heart towards you, why are you not willing to do the same?"

By international agreements, the Eastern Orthodox Church claims that it practices and supports religious liberty, but by looking at all the laws that it sought to have implemented in Russia, Romania, Serbia, and Bulgaria after the fall of Communism, it seems that the Orthodox Church's natural instinct is to establish itself as the defender of what they believe to be the one true religion, nation, and culture. However, as Djurić-Milovanović has described, this direct correlation between ethnicity and religion is no longer the norm. Our countries have changed and the EOC must acknowledge that change.

7. Conclusions

The method pursued in this paper was to move from an international documented discussion to a local discussion. Eastern Orthodoxy is an international entity and as such has international activities. It has patriarchs, synods, theologians, and historians who present the best aspects of the church. At the international and national level, it is natural that only the best is presented and celebrated. The evangelicals would like to continue to celebrate the positive aspects of Orthodoxy. Thus, most of the people that live in Orthodox countries show substantive appreciation for the Church. The history of those nations is intertwined with the history of the Orthodox Church in matters of history, politics, economics, paintings, sculpture, literature, etc. One must also accept that the future of these countries is inextricable from the presence of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Having stated all these positive realities with a deep sense of gratitude, one cannot erase those specific items and instances mentioned in this paper with which and wherein the Orthodox Church has oppressed and continues to oppress other churches. Because of this continued oppression, what follows are a number of suggestions to encourage fellowship and worship between the Orthodox and Evangelicals as we hope to move forward together at the international, national, and local village level:

1. Declarations of the oneness of the body of Christ. Jesus Christ in his prayer from John 17 tells us that by our love for our another, the world will know that we are his followers of Christ. The Eastern Orthodox Church has to demonstrate this love, and beyond this in the words of Orthodox theologian Dr. Radovan Bigovic, the Orthodox Church has a responsibility to protect minority churches—Protestants and Evangelicals (Bjelajac 2014).

2. Orthodox teaching of the sacredness of every church and religion. From the altars of the Orthodox Church, it has to be preached that people who deface other churches in any way are in the same predicament as when they would deface the Orthodox Church. (It is interesting that in the Romanian press there was a discussion that the hierarchy of the Romanian Orthodox Church should not be criticized in public!)
3. Adjusted curriculum. The Orthodox seminary curriculum has to modify the teaching of Sectology, wherein priests are taught negatively about Neo-Protestants. Some of the oppressive actions described throughout this paper have been done as the result of the instigation and sometimes the participation of the local Orthodox priest whose seminary teaching about Neo-Protestants was negative (David 1994).
4. The abolishment of the Department of Religions. This department was formed by Communists to persecute both Orthodox and Evangelicals. The Orthodox Church has retained this department after the fall of Communism and instead of being staffed by Communists it is now staffed by the Orthodox. It employs the church, the state, and the media for the sake of the Orthodox Church.
5. Interdenominational events. Positively, there are many things that the Orthodox and Evangelicals can do together. Pastors and priests can meet on a regular basis; there are holidays such as Pentecost or Harvest when all of the local believers can celebrate together. There can also be community events such as VBS or youth retreats that churches can do together.
6. Unity in the defense of Christian values. The European Union has declared that it is not only an economic, political, and militaristic union, but it is a union of values. The values that the EU has imposed over the last 5 years are diametrically opposed to the values of the Orthodox Church and the values of the Evangelicals. Just from considering the European Union's Preamble, it is clear that the from its inception, the EU has been secularist and its secularism now has become militant in its imposition of values. The Orthodox and the Evangelicals who take the Bible seriously and who are, for the most part conservative, can present a united front in the name of Christian values.
7. Services of reconciliation and forgiveness. It may be that after the Orthodox and Evangelicals work together for a while from the patriarchal level to the local level, they can have a service of reconciliation where both groups will ask forgiveness for what they have done against one another and pledge to go forward as the body of Christ, since Christ has only one Church and one Bride looking forward to His return.

May this be the decade when we experience these harmonious realities together.

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Notes

[1] The emphasis of this paper does not minimize the importance of the many meetings that are conducted between members of Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism as described in the recently published articles in April 2021 by Jemna, entitled "When the Gap between Academic Theology and the Church Makes Possible the Orthodox-Evangelical Dialogue" and Stanciu's 2019 "după 30 de ani: Evanghelicii faţă cu dialogul interconfessional" ("After 30 Years, the Evangelicals in the Interconfessional Dialogue"). The author of the article has personally participated in as many dialogues between Evangelicals and Orthodox as possible.

[2] The People's Salvation Cathedral cost over 125 million dollars, $\frac{3}{4}$ of which came from taxing all the residents of Romania, including the 15% who do not identify as members of the Orthodox Church.

[3] In contrast with historical Protestants whose religious affiliation was largely ethnic, such as the Reformed Protestant Hungarian Church and the German Protestant Lutheran Church, starting in the 16th century, the Neo-Protestants were formed towards the end of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century. Neo-Protestants include Pentecostals, Baptists, Plymouth Brethren, and a smattering of Methodists and Presbyterians later on.

[4] These Nazarene Churches were connected with the Nazarene Churches of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

[5] The activity of St. John of Kronstadt is an exception to this pattern see (The Orthodox Church in America 2013).

[6] One of the church's great doctrinal debates, between the East and the West, had to do with the procession or the sending of the Holy Spirit. The Eastern Church believed that the Father sends the Holy Spirit, while the Catholic added the term *Filioque* and by or of the Son.

[7] As the followers of Luther became Lutherans, so the followers of Tudor Popescu were known as "Tudorists" or believers according to the Scriptures.

[8] Traian Dorz from 1945–1989 spent more time in Communist jails than in liberty but produced thousands of songs and poems and today is considered one of the greatest Romanian Christian poets of the 20th century.

[9] These historians include Alexa Popovici and their *Istoria Baptistilor*, Vol. 1, 1856–1916, Vol. II, 1919–1944, Vol. III, 1944–1989. Additionally, see Ciprian Balaban and their work, *Istoria Bisericii Penticostale din România, 1922–1989*, Libraria Scriptum, Oradea, 2016.

[10] In Serbia, the initial draft limitinng the Neo-Protestants, was written in 2004 and passed in 2006 under the heading of "Laws on Churches and Religious Communities." In Russia, the Yarovaya Law, passed in 2016, limited the activities of Protestants outside of their physical church buildings. Similar laws were defeated in Bulgaria in 2018.

[11] As of writing this article the author has yet to receive a response.

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Article

Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism: An Overview of Their Relationship from the Perspective of Moral Values

Daniel Buda [1,2]

[1] Orthodox Theological Faculty, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, 550024 Sibiu, Romania; daniel.buda@ulbsibiu.ro
[2] Faculty of Theology and Religion, Pretoria University, Pretoria 0002, South Africa

Abstract: Orthodox–Evangelical relationships are dominated by proselytism (at least in Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union). This is understood as church conversion practiced through unfair means among people who are already Christians, belonging to so-called "historical churches." However, beyond it, there is a real potential for cooperation using moral values as a starting point. As there is an increasing disagreement between the Orthodox and mainline Protestant on moral values, the Orthodox and Evangelicals might increase their cooperation as they witness traditional values of Christianity. This kind of cooperation might be partially contextual, but it is based on Biblicism, which both Orthodox and Evangelicals share as a core value. As this cooperation, based on shared moral values, certainly has real potential, and has to be used for the good of Christianity, it might also have its limitations. Orthodox Christians and Evangelicals have shared common moral values, but each one of them might interpret the content of these values differently. One of the differences in interpreting and explaining the content of moral values might be given by the different interpretations of what is called church tradition.

Keywords: orthodox and evangelicals; ecumenical movement; proselytism; World Council of Churches; moral values

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1. Introduction

Orthodox–Evangelical relationships are sometimes described as being tense and unfriendly, mainly due to what Orthodoxy regards as unbridled proselytism practiced by Evangelicals among their believers or in their canonical territories. In particular, after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, predominant Orthodox countries were perceived, at least by some Evangelicals, as *terra missionis*. These complaints from the Orthodox are based (at least partially) on real facts, which are recorded in countless reports submitted to the World Council of Churches, and are well documented in several pieces of research. From the Evangelicals' point of view, they are legitimized to engage in missions wherever there are people with little (or no) knowledge about Jesus Christ and his salvation. In particular, in the 1990s, Evangelicals complained that their missionaries were disturbed (or even persecuted) by clergy of the Orthodox Church and other historical churches, as well as by state representatives who understood, in that time, religious freedom exclusively as freedom of already existing Christian confessions and religions as a means to recover after decades of oppressive communism. Therefore, apparently, there seems to be little space for Orthodox and Evangelicals to really cooperate. This short essay will attempt to prove the opposite, arguing that there are enough reasons to believe that the Orthodox and Evangelicals will increasingly cooperate in the future, having as a starting point their common ground on moral values.

Before building this argumentation, I will remark on the issue of proselytism, which doubles as the main burden for the Orthodox–Evangelical relationships. In this section, I highlight examples of good practices in the mission field, which could replace divisive proselyte actions. Afterward, I dedicate a chapter to the role of moral values in the recent

dynamics within the ecumenical movement, arguing that they play a key role in building or de-constructing trust and unity between churches and Christian traditions. Another section will deal with reasons and facts that are, in my opinion, the basis for the increasing cooperation between Orthodox and Evangelicals having moral values as common ground. In other words, I attempt to prove that their mutually-shared perceptions of moral values hold significant potential for closer cooperation. Another section presents the possible limitations of this cooperation based on moral values. In any case, Orthodox–Evangelical dialogue has potential and a future (Grass 2010) from the perspective I discuss in this paper. The final section presents the Orthodox–Evangelical relationships in Romania, my native country, focusing on the main issues described in the previous chapters. In other words, the final section of this paper is an attempt to review how Orthodox–Evangelical relationships, at the global level, apply in Romania, from the perspective of moral issues.

Some terminological clarifications are necessary in this introduction. When referring to "Orthodox" and "Orthodox churches" I understand it as, primarily, Eastern Orthodox church(es) to whom I belong. However, most of the affirmations and situations described or analyzed in this article also apply to Oriental Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches. "Evangelical" is used in the classical sense, defining those people or groups who are known under this term in global Christianity. An "Evangelical", in my opinion, seeks a kind of relationship with the Orthodox and other historical churches, while "evangelicalists" are those who reject any kind of ecumenical relations and, therefore, define themselves as the only Christians, and practice a wild proselytism. When referring to "moral values" I understand, in this article, those anthropological aspects that became reasons of division between the Orthodox and mainline Protestant churches, and are witnessed by Orthodox and Evangelicals. However, I am fully aware that the spectrum of "moral values" is much wider and includes other aspects, such as social and economic justice, ecology, etc., which could also be keys for reflecting on Orthodox–Evangelical relationships.

Apart from the indicated bibliography, the vision of this essay is based on my own experience as an employee of the World Council of Churches, Department of Church and Ecumenical Relations, and Commission on Faith and Order, between 2009 and 2019, and as an Orthodox priest and professor, active, first of all, in my national context of Romania. Therefore, it is my hope that this essay captures and describes aspects that are rarely reported by the scholarship dealing with moral issues in the ecumenical movement nowadays. I perceive this article as being, at first level, based on my ecumenical, academic, and pastoral experience. It exposes realities I experienced on the ground, more than theoretical analysis. I totally agree that my personal opinions expressed in this article, especially those on Evangelicals, might not be accepted as such by other colleagues of different confessions, including the Orthodox or Evangelicals.

2. Proselytism: Main Burden for Orthodox–Evangelical Relationships

I do not intend to present here a review of proselytism as a hindrance to Orthodox–Evangelical cooperation, as it is well known and properly documented. I would like to stress that, in the last two-three decades, there were increasing Orthodox–Evangelical relationships, as several dialogue initiatives were taken (Nassif 2014). As proselytism remains a serious issue between Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism, there are examples of finding ways to cooperate in this field, by transforming proselytist actions from the Evangelical's side into meaningful support for the Orthodox mission. An example in this direction was via Billy Graham, perhaps the most famous Evangelical figure, who evangelized on five continents (Fitzgerard 2017, p. 169); he had good relationships with the Orthodox. He understood that it did not make sense to try to convert the Orthodox, who just escaped communism, but rather support the local Orthodox churches in building their own missions. Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev, head of the Department for External Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate (Morgan 2011), listed Billy Graham as an example of "good practice" of someone who cooperated in the mission field. Moreover, there are other examples of good practice.

If such isolated examples will become general good practice, Orthodox–Evangelical relationships may significantly improve in the future. Unfortunately, for the time being, the Orthodox–Evangelical agenda of dialogue remains dominated by the issue of proselytism. Progress in this field could, at any moment, be broken, as evangelicalism is in no way a monolithic movement. There will always be, somewhere, a small group that could be called "evangelical"—one that is able to conduct proselytist actions among the Orthodox, and bring in this way, again, the persistent issue of proselytism.

Recently, several ecumenical documents that were, in a way or another, signed or recognized both by Orthodox and Evangelicals, condemned proselytism in any form. These could only reduce proselytism as a dividing issue between them. A document signed in 2011 by the World Council of Churches, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and by the World Evangelical Alliance contained recommendations for conducting appropriate ways of witnessing the gospel to non-Christians (Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World 2011). Another WCC document of mission reaffirmed that "proselytism is not a legitimate way of practicing evangelism" (Together Towards Life 2012, p. 30). In 2017, the Global Christian Forum issued a document called *Call to Mission. Perceptions of Proselytism,* which condemned different facets of this phenomenon (Call to Mission 2017).

3. The Role of Moral Values in the Ecumenical Movement Today

Those involved in ecumenical work shall agree that the issue of *moral values* is playing an increasing role in the ecumenical dialogue. Historically speaking, the issue of moral values is quite new in the ecumenical movement. It did not exist, or it played a marginal role in the history of the efforts for Christian unity (up until recently). As the modern ecumenical movement emerged, its main role was defined as being the one to overcome the doctrinal differences between different churches and traditions. If one takes the year 1948 as a milestone, i.e., the foundation of the World Council of Churches, one may affirm that, after decades of ecumenical efforts, in spite of some remarkable progress in reaching an agreement on several doctrinal differences, there are still divisive doctrinal issues between churches and traditions. At the same time, a second, and in my opinion, a more visible and perceivable divisive issue emerged: moral values.

The proof that, for several decades, moral values did not exist as a divisive issue for member churches from the World Council of Churches, is the fact that it does not have a moral or ethical basis, only a doctrinal one (WCC Constitution). They appeared for the first time, clearly, as a divisive issue for WCC member churches in the 9th Assembly, Harare, Zimbabwe, 1998. The Orthodox Churches, both Eastern and Oriental, portrayed themselves as defenders of traditional values of Christianity. Already before the Harare Assembly, probably based on the agenda prepared for it, representatives of Orthodox churches gathered for a meeting in Thessaloniki, Greece, from 29 April–2 May 1998, and issued a document called *Evaluation of New Facts in the Relations of Orthodoxy and the Ecumenical Movement*. It mentions "certain developments within some Protestant members of the Council that are reflected in the debates of the WCC and are regarded as unacceptable by the Orthodox." (FitzGerard and Bouteneff 1998, pp. 137–38). Among them are mentioned "the rights of sexual minorities." (Buda 2014, p. 131). Moreover, the pre-assembly meeting for the Orthodox delegates to participate at the Harare Assembly, held at St. Ephraim Theological Seminary near Damascus, Syria, 7–13 May, 1998, affirmed in its final statement that the relationships of the Orthodox to the WCC "became a matter of serious study" (FitzGerard and Bouteneff 1998, pp. 9–10). Among the reasons for this affirmation is the reality that the Orthodox are "victims of proselytism," but also "value crisis" and "the moral stances taken by certain Christian groups" (Buda 2014, p. 131).

The crisis within WCC after the Harare Assembly and the creation of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC were also caused by the increasing ethical differences between WCC member churches. In spite of the fact that the "Final Report" (Final Report 2004) deled in an acceptable way the issues raised by the Orthodox, including the ethical issues (Bouteneff 2003), WCC programmatic work continued to approach the

sensitive topic of moral issues in such a manner that the pre-assembly meeting for the 10th WCC General Assembly gathered in Kos, Greece, from 11–17 October 2012, formulated the following critical remarks:

> We (i.e., the Orthodox) often hear comments about the crisis in the ecumenical movement . . . To a greater extent, this is a consequence of the fact that the idea of visible unity is seen as unrealistic by many ecumenical partners, the Orthodox among them. We see this as a consequence of the developments taking place in some member churches over the last years (e.g., the ordination of women, different approaches to moral and ethical issues etc.)". (Communiqué 2013)

The statement also proposes a solution for this crisis: "to go back to the theological and moral teaching and practices of the early Church." (Communiqué 2013).

The 10th WCC Assembly in Busan, Korea, October–November 2013, offered a sample of how divisive moral issues can be for the WCC and its member churches. At the beginning of the assembly, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, presented a paper called *The Voice of the Church Must be Prophetic*. Metropolitan Hilarion firstly identified two challenges for the Christian world today: militant secularism and radical Islamism. In his opinion, militant secularism targets today "fundamental aspects of the everyday life of the human person," aiming for "the straightforward destruction of traditional notions of marriage and family." (Hilarion of Volokolamsk 2014). He explains further:

> This is witnessed by the new phenomenon of equating homosexual unions with marriage and allowing single-sex couples to adopt children. From the point of view of biblical teaching and traditional Christian values, this testifies to a profound crisis . . . Under the pretext of combating discrimination, a number of countries have introduced changes in family legislation. Over the past few years, single-sex cohabitation has been legalized in a number of states in the USA, a number of Latin American countries, and in New Zeeland. This year homosexual unions have attained the legal status of "marriage" in England, Wales, and France. . . . The notion of parents, that is, of the father and the mother, of what is male and what is female, is radically altered. . . . The family in its Christian understanding is falling apart to be replaced by such impersonal terms as "parent number one" and "parent number two." . . . Children who are brought up in families with "two fathers" or "two mothers" will already have views on social and ethical values different from their contemporaries from traditional families". (Hilarion of Volokolamsk 2014)

After this exposure, Metropolitan Hilarion addressed the following question to whom he proposed a response:

> What is the response of the Christian Churches? . . . this response can be none other than that which is based on the divine revelation as handed down to us in the Bible. . . . We may have significant differences in the interpretation of Scripture, but we all possess the same Bible and its moral teaching is laid out quite unambiguously. (Hilarion of Volokolamsk 2014)

Regarding the church's response to the challenge of militant secularism, Metropolitan Hilarion observed that:

> Unfortunately, not all Christian churches today find within themselves the courage and resolve to vindicate the biblical ideals by going against that which is fashionable and the prevalent secular outlook. Some Christian communities have long ago embarked on a revision of moral teaching aimed at making it more in a step with modern tendencies". (Hilarion of Volokolamsk 2014)

Metropolitan Hilarion acknowledged that the division of Christians into liberals and conservatives was a reality. He argued that the witness of the Orthodox Church could not be reduced to mere conservatism. He stated that:

> "We see how in a number of Christian communities a headlong liberalization is occurring in religious ethics, as a rule under the influence of processes taking place in secular society. . . .
>
> We are not speaking about conservativism but of fidelity to divine revelation, which is contained in scripture. And if the so-called liberal Christians reject the traditional Christian understanding of moral norms, then this means that we are running up against a serious problem in our Christian witness. Are we able to hear this witness if we are so deeply divided in question of moral teaching, which are as important for the salvation as dogma?" (Hilarion of Volokolamsk 2014)

I was in the plenary hall of the Busan Assembly when Metropolitan Hilarion delivered this paper. The participants were instantly divided into two groups those who agreed with the message of the paper and those who disagreed with it. None of the participants who were asked to put forward questions, or to react, could keep their emotions under control. Personally, I have never witnessed a more divided ecumenical gathering. Then, I realized once again how divisive moral issues can be for the ecumenical movement and how counterproductive it is to deal with such issues in an improper way. The entire assembly was, in one way or another, dominated by the challenge of Metropolitan Hilarion. Participants debated extensively this specific speech in their particular meetings. Some of the Orthodox speakers, such as Metropolitan Nifon of Tirgoviște (Romanian Orthodox Church), openly supported Metropolitan Hilarion's speech:

> For a better understanding of what ecumenism means, we have to explain thoroughly what we do in our meetings, to assure our people that nothing of our precious traditions are lost, changed, or watered down. We always remind them, and we should remind ourselves too, that we should defend our traditional moral values, particularly the value of the Christian family. (Nifon of Tirgoviste 2014, p. 94)

Moral values are generally perceived as being *divisive* as churches that are members of different ecumenical organizations might have different positions on moral values. Moreover, it is often affirmed that the divisive potential of moral values is ever greater, as they increasingly divide not only churches of different traditions, but also churches of the same tradition, and even members and groups of the same church. I do not intend to criticize these affirmations or dilute their value. Instead, I would like to argue that the challenge of moral values in the ecumenical movement brings a new sense of unity. Some of them are to be expected (e.g., the fact that several theologians belonging to different church traditions reflect on the issue and articulate clearly their positions on moral values). Others are rather a surprise. In this last category, in my opinion, belongs the potential of increasing Orthodox–Evangelical relationships based on the common ground of moral values.

4. Orthodox–Evangelical Relationships Based on the Common Ground of Moral Values

The 7th WCC Assembly in Canberra, Australia, 1991, which approached for the first time in the history of the WCC a pneumatology theme—"Come Holy Spirit renew the whole creation"—brought serious tensions within WCC fellowship. They were caused by different attitudes around a presentation of the Korean female professor Chung Kyung-Hyung, who associated some "spirits" with the Holy Spirit. Orthodox and Evangelical raised similar concerns that emerged in a desire to establish a dialogue "as soon as possible" (Pirri-Simonian and Beek 2012, p. 7).

The potential for closer cooperation between the Orthodox and Evangelicals, based on the common ground of moral values, was already perceived during the 9th WCC Assembly in Harare, 1998, when the differences in moral values between the Orthodox and representatives of some mainline Protestant churches broke up in a shocking way for the Orthodox. In this sense, already in that time, one spoke about an "evangelical–orthodox alliance." The atmosphere in that assembly was described by an observer as the following:

> Both Orthodox and mainline evangelicals are unhappy with the liberal Protestant ethos they say dominates WCC debate on issues such as feminism, inclusive language in Bible translation, same-sex unions, the ordination of homosexuals, abortion, environmentalism, and population control. (Finger 1999)

In a similar manner, Metropolitan Hilarion of the Russian Orthodox Church, who spoke about some common points between Orthodox and Evangelical, stated that "many evangelicals share conservative positions with us (i.e., the Orthodox) on such issues as abortion, the family, and marriage" (Morgan 2011).

This potential cooperation in the field of moral values between the Orthodox and Evangelicals becomes more attractive as the Orthodox (surprisingly and increasingly) see how mainline protestant churches, especially from Europe and North America, together part of WCC, depart from the traditional ethical values. Naturally, the Orthodox looks for other partners who share the same moral values. The traditional partner in this regard is the Roman Catholic Church. As the Orthodox–Roman Catholic partnership involves a series of other complex historical aspects, the Orthodox are interested in seeking new ways of developing partnerships with other emerging Christian groups, such as the Evangelicals. Recent (rather confusing) statements of Pope Francis on homosexuality can only make the Orthodox determined to seek closer cooperation with Evangelicals.

Cooperation with Evangelicals in the moral field brings some particular dynamics. I would like to briefly discuss this potential relationship with the WCC. In this organization, Orthodox and Evangelicals discovered that they have common points, especially in the field of moral values. I experienced several WCC Central Committees where Orthodox and Evangelical members formed a common front when moral issues were discussed. I remember a tense session of the Commission on Faith and Order, which took place in Romania (Faith and Order Paper No. 222 2015), in which Orthodox and Evangelical members of the Commission had the same opinion on how moral discernment should be understood and used in future Commission work. During the coffee break, I talked with an Evangelical brother and expressed my gratitude for his support, but at the same time, I told him my thoughts that he could be more vocal in expressing his opinion. His response was simple and clear: "I felt well represented by my Orthodox brothers and sisters."

This reality was observed by all sides. As it is obvious that discussions on moral values will play a more important role within the fellowship of WCC, special attention is paid to which new member churches are accepted in. This is how I would explain the reservations of some historical Protestant churches to accept churches with an evangelical flavor into WCC (Buda 2018). As a staff member of the World Council of Churches, I was in charge of dealing with applications for membership in the global fellowship for 10 years. Even if the criteria for acceptance in WCC do not include any reference to the approach of the applicant church, regarding moral values, any application implied this aspect in an indirect way. Officially or unofficially, I was asked by Central and/or Executive Committee members how "Evangelical" applicant churches were. On the other hand, while visiting applicant churches, I was often asked by their representatives what was the approach of WCC on moral values, as they heard that WCC encouraged a liberal, moral attitude. I remember a visit to an African Instituted church in Kenya, which had a strong Evangelical flavor, where the above-mentioned question was raised as a matter of concern. I responded that WCC as a global ecumenical organization does not have an official position on moral values, but its member churches may have a more liberal approach, like some mainline protestant churches, or a moral traditional approach, like the Orthodox. After my explanation, the head of that church concluded: "In this regard we are Orthodox".

The common ground on moral values between the Orthodox and the Evangelicals is not mere contextual, i.e., it is not determined exclusively by the new constellations formed around moral values. The Orthodox and the Evangelicals share the same attitudes on ethical–moral issues, first of all, because both use the Bible as a primary source of revelation. Therefore, biblical understanding of moral values, and not the context of global Christianity, is the primary source for such cooperation.

5. Potential and Possible Limitations of Orthodox–Evangelical Cooperation Based on Moral Values

What is the potential of Orthodox–Evangelical cooperation based on moral values? Cooperation in this field emerges primarily from the Bible as the primary source of revelation, as well as in the field of ethics, and not from the context of new arrangements in the complexity of global Christianity. With this in mind, such cooperation may play a genuine prophetic role for the future of Christianity: Orthodox and Evangelicals (Roman Catholics could also contribute to it!) could strongly witness a return to biblical–ethical values. It is very important that Orthodox–Evangelical cooperation should not be built against other traditions, but rather for the sake of witnessing values for the entirety of Christianity. This increasing cooperation between Orthodox and Evangelicals needs to have an explicit *ecumenical* dimension. I envisage it as another way of practicing ecumenism. As in recent years, the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical organizations were very receptive to new ways of expressing modernity and emancipation, which clearly conflicted with core biblical values; Orthodox and Evangelicals may be a strong voice for keeping traditional values of Christianity as a basis for developing a strong Christian witness to the world.

Such a witness would be a wonderful translation of dialogue into action or a meaningful activism. Political activism, in the sense of witnessing Christian values to international organizations, such as the United Nations, the European Union, etc., or to different governments in order to keep traditional values on which national states are built upon, is another concrete way of possible cooperation based on common moral values.

Personally, I strongly believe that the fact that the Orthodox and some Evangelicals are part of the World Council of Churches brings great potential. This potential shall be even bigger if members of some mainline Protestant churches with an Evangelical approach would be more vocal within their churches and as representatives in WCC. Their common witness on common moral values may reshape the direction of this global ecumenical organization. The same may apply to regional ecumenical organizations, the national councils of churches, and even the Global Christian Forum. Unfortunately some of these organizations do not have clear criteria for taking new members and are skeptical in accepting, in their fellowships, any churches that might be defined, in one way or another, as "Evangelical." (Saydat El Jabal 2012). As a former staff member of WCC who was responsible, for 10 years, for the applications for membership in WCC, I can witness that many churches with Evangelical approaches would have more interest in WCC if this organization would place more emphasis on traditional moral values and on concrete evangelism and mission.

In my opinion the Global Christian Forum offers great potential in witnessing traditional moral values, as the Roman Catholic Church is also present.

We also need to speak about the possible *limitations* of this cooperation. Here, I can only briefly formulate its main elements. The main limitation might come from two sources:

(1) The different understandings that the Orthodox and the Evangelicals have on the role of tradition in explaining and understanding biblical ethical values;

(2) The great imbalance or asymmetry (Cole 2019) of historical experience in dealing with biblical–ethical values. While the Orthodox have a bi-millennial experience in living according to the Bible, in the church, evangelicals have a much shorter historical experience. This may create differences and perhaps tensions in explaining and experiencing moral values.

Keeping in mind these two elements, one may surprisingly realize that the Orthodox and the Evangelicals agree with what are the main biblical–ethical values they share, but they might disagree on how their content is perceived and explained to the world. However, I would like to end this essay on an optimistic note: Evangelicals (or at least some of them) are increasingly interested in the way in which moral issues are perceived in other Christian traditions (Greenman 1994), and in researching new ways of building moral content with extra-biblical support (Simmons 2009). Efforts from the Evangelical side, conducted in the last decades to present their ethical values in a systematic and more explicit way, based on

their own traditions and experiences, are appreciated in the Orthodox world (Sider 2015). In particular, the increasing Evangelical interest for Patristic writings, and their ethical approach in dialogue with the complex world, is highly appreciated by the Orthodox (Steward 2008; Williams 2005).

Finally, I would like to stress that, for a mutual and constructive relationship, it is equally important that the Orthodox show interest in the way Evangelicals perceive the same matters. I am confident that such a mutual interest and learning exists, as, according to an old and widely accepted Patristic principle, a wise human being is ready to learn from nature, from plants, and animals and, therefore, even more from other human beings.

6. Orthodox–Evangelical Relationships: The Case of Romania

In this section, I briefly describe how Orthodox–Evangelical relationships are designed from the perspective of the main issues raised in this article: proselytism, common moral values, and their common public witness. Regarding proselytism, the Romanian Orthodox Church is a typical case of one raising constant complaints against evangelicals—that they practice sheep stealing in a programmatic way. The beginning and rise of the evangelical mission in Romania in the second part of the 19th and first part of the 20th century was perceived by the Orthodox Romanians as a real threat against the very existence of the Orthodox Church and of the Romanian ethnic identity, as the Orthodox Church and Romanian nation are perceived, then and even today, as inseparable. There are very different perceptions of the beginnings and the history of evangelicalism in Romania. Evangelical historians speak about a promising beginning and a great reception of their message among people, and a series of threats, violence, and persecution from the Orthodox Church, and other historical churches in Romania and from the Romanian state (Dobrincu and Mănăstireanu 2018, pp. 113–35). The Orthodox speak about an assault of foreign missions with no understanding for the Orthodox and for the Romanian context which they entered. A simple look at the theological literature produced in the first part of the 20th century provides an image of how these new missions were perceived. As they ignored the fact that they were evangelizing people who were Christians, and part of a rich tradition since the first centuries of the Christian era, they attacked, in an improper manner, some core values of Orthodoxy and local spirituality, such as the veneration of the saints and of the Holy Mother of God, the spirituality related with the Cross, prayers for the late forefathers, etc. In the eyes of the Orthodox, this foreign mission was pointless and dangerous. Therefore, manuals of missiology from that time put all evangelicals in one category: "sects" (Ispir 1928, p. 9). Newer manuals of "sectology" did not significantly change this perception (David 1999).

The relationships between Romanian Orthodox and Evangelicals were certainly complicated by the fact that local split groups of Evangelical flavors emerged within the Romanian Orthodox Church. The so-called Tudorists (Romanian: Tudoriști) were founded by a former Orthodox priest named Tudor Popescu, after he started teaching against the veneration of the saints and against the sacraments. (David 1999, pp. 64–66). The movement, called Lord's Army (Romanian: Oastea Domnului), was founded as a renewal movement within the Romanian Orthodox Church using obvious Evangelical means. Several groups separated from Lord's Army and joined Evangelical churches already in the early history of this movement. This is the main reason why Orthodox theologians used to have positive (Dehelianu 1948, p. 41) and negative (David 1999, pp. 290–94; Ică 1996, VI) opinions about it. Those having a positive opinion on the Lord's Army consider it an efficient tool for defending Orthodoxy in Romania, while those opposing this movement perceive it as having an Evangelic flavor, too foreign to Orthodox spirituality.

One may affirm that, in recent years, the issue of proselytism was not damaging the Orthodox–Evangelical relationships so much anymore. That does not mean that proselytism decreased. It rather took other forms, or was oriented in other directions (Rițișan and Constantinescu 2018) Ecumenical organizations have very little influence in this matter, as no evangelical church from Romania is a member in any regional or

global ecumenical organization. Regarding the common moral values, they are not yet a factor for bringing the Orthodox and Evangelicals together, as all historical churches in Romania, including mainline Protestants, openly witness traditional values of Christianity. A referendum organized in 2018, which was initiated by a Christian based association, attempted to define family in traditional terms, as a union between a man and a woman. This initiative was openly supported by the Consultative Council of Officially Recognized Religious Communities in Romania through an official statement (Andrei 2018). This consultative Council has, as members, some Evangelical Churches. One may expect that some similar initiatives that intend to promote traditional values in Romanian society or reject initiatives of humanist–atheistic circles aimed at making Romanian society more secular will bring Orthodox and Evangelicals closer together in Romania. This already happened in 2014, when an initiative of such circles, aimed at complicating the process of registering children for the religious class, was opposed by the same Consultative Council.

However, in terms of common activism in Romanian society through more elaborated common projects and common public witness, it seems that, for the time being, this is not possible. I have seen public demonstrations pro vita (for life and against abortions) organized by the Orthodox, and similar demonstrations organized by Evangelicals separately. This separation in public witness is, for the time being, comfortable for both sides. Evangelical public witness and profiles in Romania are still "under construction." It seems to me that "homo evangelicus", as presented in a new (and in many ways, remarkable) publication (Dobrincu and Mănăstireanu 2018), is ready to be a patriot, in Romanian context, a public figure that witnesses to other people and to Romanian society, and, last but not least, a figure that has both past (i.e., history) and future in Romania.

7. Conclusions

New, emerging discussions within global Christianity, on what one refers to as moral values, creates new divisions, but also new opportunities for cooperation. As the division between the Orthodox and mainline Protestants increases due to the liberal approach of the latter, new opportunities are open for cooperation with the Evangelicals. Only the future will tell how these relationships will develop. In any case, the hope is that common ground on moral issues will develop in common witness, for the sake of the entirety of Christianity.

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Article

Eco-Theology and Environmental Leadership in Orthodox and Evangelical Perspectives in Russia and Ukraine

Alexander Negrov [1,*] and Alexander Malov [2]

[1] Center for Leadership Research, Hodos Institute, Mukilteo, WA 98275, USA
[2] Theology and Leadership Research Unit, Hodos Institute, 08200 Irpin, Ukraine; amalov@hodosinstitute.org
* Correspondence: anegrov@hodosinstitute.com

Abstract: Environmental leadership and eco-theology have not been a priority for Evangelical and Orthodox Christians in the countries of the former Soviet Union (particularly, Ukraine and Russia) due to various historical, political, social, and theological reasons. However, contemporary environmental global challenges suggest that both Orthodox and Evangelical Christians should revisit their perspectives and efforts related to responsible stewardship by humankind of the earth and its life forms. This article presents the analysis of multiple forms of data (relevant Orthodox and Evangelical documents, specialized literature, and individual interviews/focus groups). We conducted individual interviews and focus groups with 101 Evangelical and 50 Orthodox Christians from Russia and Ukraine. Although the majority of interviewees agreed that the ecological crisis exists and should be addressed, only some of them admitted that they actively care for creation. While Orthodox Christians are more active in practical care for creation, Evangelicals have a stronger grasp of the biblical teaching concerning nature and humans' responsibility for it. We argue that Evangelical and Orthodox Churches in Ukraine and Russia can learn from each other and impact their communities: engage minds, touch hearts, feed souls, and respond to environmental challenges as an expression of their faith and leadership.

Keywords: Orthodox; Evangelicals; ecology; creation care; leadership; Russia; Ukraine

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1. Introduction

Religion is connected with ecology. This is widely accepted by scholars of religious studies (Gottlieb 2006). Grim and Tucker (2014), the editors of the Harvard book series "*Religions of the World and Ecology*", argued that religions provide for people the basic interpretive stories of who humans are and what their nature is, where humans have come from, and where they are going. Religions suggest to humans how they should treat other humans and how they should relate to nature.

Eco-theology, creation care, and environmental leadership are noteworthy themes for the world's three major Christian traditions—Roman Catholicism, Orthodox Christianity, and Protestantism (Blanchard 2014; Chryssavgis 2013; Hessel and Ruether 2007; Jenkins 2008; Schaefer 2011). O'Brien (2010) stressed that the well-being of people and a balanced biodiversity on the earth is a point of intersection between Christian faith and ethics, social justice and environmentalism, science and politics, and global problems and local solutions.

In recent decades, many leaders and theologians of various Christian traditions have met to address the growing ecological challenges on the earth. While they might disagree on various Christian dogmas, they concurred in saying that "the Christian community has a special obligation to provide moral leadership and an example of caring service to people and to all God's creation" (Oxford Declaration on Global Warming 2002). The international participants of the Lausanne Global Consultation on Creation Care lately agreed that ecology is "a gospel issue within the lordship of Christ". The consultation's declaration—A Jamaica Call for Actions (Creation Care and the Gospel: Jamaica Call to

Action 2012)—stated, "Many of the world's poorest people, ecosystems, and species of flora and fauna are being devastated by violence against the environment in multiple ways . . . . We can no longer afford complacency and endless debate. Love for God, our neighbors . . . and the wider creation, as well as our passion for justice, compel us to 'urgent and prophetic ecological responsibility'".

Orthodox Christianity and Protestantism are well represented in Russia and Ukraine. Many people in these countries identify themselves as Christians and view religion as an important part of their lives. Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox and Evangelical churches are somewhat concerned with ecological problems in the world. While church leaders note that an ecological theme is not the most important for the Church today, they will argue that this theme should not be neglected as unimportant. Thus, they periodically encourage their believers to safeguard the integrity of God's creation by sustaining and renewing the life of the earth.

Both Evangelical and Orthodox Christians in Russia and Ukraine periodically convene conversations around ecology and faith[1]. For example, the leaders of the Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox churches authorized an annual day of prayer for the environment (Epiphanius 2019; JMHS 2015). Their clergies are encouraged to preach on this day, the first of September, about Christian ecological stances and remind their parishioners that the natural environment is the spiritual responsibility of Orthodox believers (JMHS 2015). Although Russian and Ukrainian Evangelicals occasionally talk about protecting, restoring, and rightly sharing God's Creation, they have not commenced in their churches a day of prayer for the environment, and do not urge preaching around faith and ecology.

Despite a vast interest among scholars to investigate the religious perspectives and practices among the Orthodox and Evangelicals, to this point no attention has been given to compare their perspectives on the issues of eco-theology, creation care, and environmental leadership. Thus, this article is bridging a gap in scholarly literature and offers the impetus for further studies. The goal of this article is to present the results of analysis of research interviews with 101 Evangelicals (Baptist, Pentecostal, and Charismatic) and 50 Orthodox Christians from Russia and Ukraine. Open-ended questions were used to gather and compare theological and practical perspectives related to ecology and Christianity. We argue that Evangelical and Orthodox churches in Ukraine and Russia can learn from each other and impact their communities: engage minds, touch hearts, feed souls, and respond to environmental challenges as an expression of their faith.

From a theoretical point of view this study relates to several theoretical paradigms. For example, it illuminates some of the assumptions of social constructionist theoretical ideas which postulate that environmental claims are produced by different forms of social construction. Environmental constructionist sociology argues that the existence and force of social constructs determine the acknowledgment of ecological problems and search for environmental solutions. A good discussion about social construction of environmental issues and problems is presented by Hannigan (2014). Our research shows that the eco–theology and environmental leadership of Christians in Russia and Ukraine is tied to what environmental sociologists call the "constructionist–realist" debate.

This study contributes to theoretical debate within missiology and practical theology. It could be used, for example, as a case study that stimulates the advancement of an ecologically grounded Christian practical theology. For practical theologians (especially in Russia and Ukraine), it is important to advance a theological, eschatological, and ecological anthropology that is undeniably needed in the midst of the current global ecological crisis. Such an anthropology, in the words of Jennifer Ayres, "should necessitate a willingness to live in and for our unfinished world" (Ayres 2017, p. 60).

2. Background for This Study

2.1. Global and Local Assessments of Ecology

It can be said that environmental concerns have both global and local contexts. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)

recently completed a massive assessment of global ecology and found that nature and its vital contributions to people, which together embody biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, were deteriorating worldwide and declining more rapidly than ever (IPBES 2019). In 2020, the Russian Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment published a local environmental assessment relative to the Russian Federation. This report pointed to various problems related to biodiversity and ecosystems within the Russian Federation (Russian State Report 2020). The alarm about the unhealthy local ecology was also articulated by Ukrainian authorities (Ukrainian National Report 2018).

The Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM) and Institute of Social Research conducted sociological research on the environmental issues in modern Russia (Analytical Review: Environmental Agenda 2020). The study noted that 30% of adult Russians said the environmental situation in Russia was very bad. According to 53% of Russians, the local ecology had deteriorated in the previous 2–3 years. At the same time, 40% of adult Russians believed that the problem of ecological crisis and global warming was overblown and exaggerated. This was shown by VSIOM's survey of 1600 Russians aged 18 and older (Climate Change and How to Fight It 2020).

The health of the planet is the common concern of humankind. Nowadays, it is often acknowledged by intergovernmental agencies, local governmental institutions, and civil organizations of all kinds and sizes. Ostap Semerak, a Ukrainian politician and former Minister of Ecology, recently pointed out that the development and conservation of biological diversity was a worthy cause for which Ukrainian society, together with the church and authorities, must unite (News Report 2017).

2.2. Orthodox Christianity and Evangelicalism in Russia and Ukraine

In the history of Russia and Ukraine, Orthodox Christianity and Evangelicalism each have their own historical developments (Baron and Kollmann 1997; Magocsi 2010; Nikol'skaya 2009; Pospielovsky 1998; Ratajeski 2014; Riasanovsky and Steinberg 2019). In the past and in our time, the Russian and Ukrainian Evangelicals and Orthodox play their roles in the ongoing arduous social and political life of their countries (Clark and Vovk 2020; Krawchuk and Bremer 2017; Metreveli 2020; Papkova 2011; Richters 2013; Shestopalets 2019). Several recent publications revealed their achievements and/or failures (for example, see Kazmina and Filippova 2005; Lyubashchenko 2010).

There exists vast literature about Evangelicals and Orthodox in Russia and Ukraine. The religious, historical, and sociocultural connections between these Christian traditions and their communities can be traced in various discourses: biblical interpretation (Negrov 2006, 2008; Likhosherstov 2013); mission of the Church (Kochetkov 2002; Sawatsky 2004; Ubeivolc 2016); and theological teachings (Fiddes and Songulashvili 2013; Puzynin 2011). Occasionally, scholars compare the Orthodox and Evangelicals through various lenses. For example, in a recent article, Elena Prutskova (2021) presented the analysis of two surveys that aimed to measure religiosity among different Christian groups in Russia. She concluded that the level of religiosity among the Russian Orthodox parishioners is slightly lower than representatives of the Evangelical Protestants in Russia.

There should not be an assumption that there are no differences among the Evangelicals and that the Russian and the Ukrainian Orthodox churches are identical in their theological and ideological ways. For example, it should be noted that the new Orthodox Church of Ukraine recently received autocephaly and is partially recognized by autocephalous Orthodox Churches (the reasons for Ukrainian Orthodox autocephaly are well articulated by Cyril Hovorun (2020a)). Yet, there is disapproval toward this church from the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) in Ukraine. The messianic discourse ideology is widespread in contemporary Russia (Kushnir 2019). The so-called concept of symphonia of church–state relationships when the Orthodox Christianity becomes political religion (Hovorun 2018) is appropriate to the Orthodox Church in the Russian Federation. Cyril Hovorun (2020b), however, points out that in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, there is

a desire for a "symphony" with civil society, instead of a traditional symphonic relationship with the state.

3. Method

The inquiry results presented in this article were based on qualitative research that was characterized by gathering multiple forms of data such as interviews, focus groups and documents, rather than relying on a single data source. The main source of data was collected in individual interviews and focus groups. This information was complemented by the analysis of relevant Orthodox and Evangelical documents and literature.

The methodology of qualitative investigation is systematically reviewed by academicians (Creswell and Poth 2018; Gubrium and Holstein 2002; King and Horrocks 2010; Tracy 2020). Analysis of documents and research interviewing are a very well accepted approach in qualitative research (King and Horrocks 2010; Creswell and Poth 2018). It is also commonly accepted that the methodology of qualitative study has an evolving design rather than a tightly prefigured design. Hatch (2002), Marshall and Rossman (2010), and Creswell and Poth (2018) indicate that qualitative inquiry has several vital characteristics. For example: (1) it focuses on general participants' perspectives, their meanings, and their multiple subjective views; and (2) the process of designing a qualitative study emerges during inquiry (e.g., the size of the sample and/or list of questions may eventually evolve), etc.

This study does not analyze how the eco-theological ideas and practices of environmental leadership depend on specific factors such as micro ecclesiastic/doctrinal identities among Orthodox or Evangelicals, geographical locations, residential patterns (urban, nonurban), marriage status, education level, age, or other demographics. Our analysis of interview and focus-group materials epitomizes what Creswell (2013) names to be a holistic account of qualitative inquiry. According to Creswell, qualitative researchers try to develop a complex broad sketch under study. They later report the larger picture that emerges and are not bound by the analysis of tight relationships among micro factors. Rather, the researchers identify the complex interactions of factors in general context (Creswell 2013, p. 47). Therefore, the current study focuses on general tendencies in eco-theological thinking and practices of environmental leadership among Evangelical and Orthodox Christians in Russia and Ukraine. This study investigates the larger picture that allows further research projects to dive into the analysis of links and/or cause-and-effect relationships among other significant factors.

3.1. Questions and Sampling of Individual Interviews/Focus Group

This study comprised face-to-face and online (Zoom, telephone) qualitative research interviewing of 151 participants from Orthodox and Evangelical religious communities in Russia and Ukraine. Following is the list of interview and focus-group questions:

1. What value does nature and animals have for humans and for you personally?
2. What can you say about the ecological situation in the country, in the world?
3. How do you feel about what is called the modern environmental crisis?
4. What can you say about the attitude of contemporary Christians towards nature and the environment?
5. How do you understand the idea of creation care?
6. Can you share what you personally do to care for creation?
7. Knowing that you are familiar with the Bible, can you tell what it says about nature and the animals?

After a random selection of first respondents, a snowball sampling strategy was used to identify other potential subjects. A snowball sampling strategy utilizes the help of research participants to recruit additional research subjects (Patton 2009; Tracy 2020). Participants were asked to encourage others to come forward for interview. When new individuals were named, the researchers used a "cold-calling" technique, contacting the

individual out of the blue. Some participants were recruited by researchers via social-media networking platforms such as Facebook and VKontakte.

We interviewed 50 Orthodox (10 females and 40 males; 44 from Ukraine and 6 from Russia) and 101 Evangelical (33 females and 68 males; 62 from Russia and 39 from Ukraine) Christians. Twelve focus groups were organized with the participation of the Russian and Ukrainian Evangelicals.

It is important to explain the different sample sizes among the Evangelicals and Orthodox. The Evangelical Christians (individually or in groups) were interviewed before enforced social distancing and lockdown related to COVID-19. Various restrictions related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) blocked a possibility to interview groups of Orthodox Christians. Thus, as stated above, the researchers recruited the Orthodox believers only for individual interviews.

The inclusion criteria for the study were men and women who were:

- Religious practitioners—active members of Evangelical or Orthodox churches;
- Aged 18 years and above; and
- Lived in Russia or Ukraine.

The sample for this study was chosen to represent a diversity of Christians' gender, church status (priests, deacons, laity), and location (urban, rural, suburban). It should be noted, however, that the controversial and novel subject of the research significantly hampered the research process. In our experience, many Orthodox believers were quite reluctant to be interviewed compared to the Evangelicals. In addition, while the interviews were conducted both in the form of direct and telephone conversations, they happened in the context of the still-prevailing coronavirus pandemic in Russia and Ukraine. Thus, certain restrictions and limitations have resulted from it.

Notice that, despite our commitment to having an equal proportion of respondents from Ukraine and Russia, Orthodox Christians from Russia were less open to participate in the research. The following response to the interview invitation serves as an example of this tendency: "*I am the Church's bureaucrat. Talk to laity. I personally don't mind, but you should have an official request for the right to interview me. It's not easy to interview me*". Another potential Orthodox respondent from Russia declined to be interviewed and replied as follows: "*Imagine that today is the Fall of 1941 and you are conducting this research . . . . Given the conditions of the ongoing war against humanity (literally there is World War III, 'Covid-fascism') the problems of your research topic are less relevant, unfortunately*".

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

The researchers asked participants the open-ended questions (listed above), which helped stimulate thought among interviewees and encouraged them to express their views without inhibition, fear of interviewer bias, or unnecessary limitations (Creswell and Poth 2018; Tracy 2020). The interviews were recorded, and they were transcribed either in Russian or Ukrainian languages. After analyzing the transcripts of all individual and group interviews using MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software, we compared Evangelical and Orthodox perspectives on environmental leadership (creation care) and eco-theology.

In the process of interpretation of the data, we were able to establish "themes", "categories", or "concepts" that were embedded in the data. The interpretation of the answers of our respondents allowed us to establish hierarchical codes; i.e., "umbrella" categories that made conceptual sense. In our research, we followed the coding techniques suggested by Saldaña (2016).

3.3. Limitations

Our document analysis, as a form of qualitative research, focuses on the selected official Orthodox and Evangelical documents and specialized literature. This is an exemplary rather than an exhaustive document analysis. Moreover, no analysis has been performed to interpret the public records (the official, ongoing news of Churches' activities, annual reports, etc.), personal documents of Evangelical or Orthodox believers (accounts of an indi-

vidual's convictions and actions expressed via e-mails, Facebook posts, reflections/journals, etc.), and/or artifacts (flyers, posters, printed educational materials, etc.).

The current study focuses on general tendencies in eco-theological thinking and practices of environmental leadership among Evangelical and Orthodox Christians in Russia and Ukraine. It does not analyze how these ideas and practices depend on specific micro factors (doctrinal/canonical identities, geographical locations, residential patterns (urban, nonurban), marriage status, education level, age, or other demographics). Such analysis was beyond the scope of this study.

The current study also does not represent a longitudinal analysis of eco-theology and environmental leadership among Russian and Ukrainian Christians. Since there has been no previous study done on this topic, it was not possible to make such an analysis. However, future research undertakings ought to investigate how eco-theological perspectives and practices of environmental responsibility will be changed among both Evangelicals and Orthodox. Further studies can identify, analyze, and explain similarities and differences in eco-theology and environmental leadership among the Evangelical and Orthodox Christians in Russia and Ukraine by paying attention to specific Church categorizations and sociodemographic profiles.

4. Analysis and Findings

4.1. Review of Relevant Documents and Specialized Literature

What is the ecological agenda of Evangelicals and Orthodox? Official documents produced by Russian and Ukrainian Church leaders shed some light on their positions on various ecological and environmental issues (see BSCROC 2000; PROC on Current Environmental Problems 2013; RPECU 2018; SCRUEB 2014; SPPCR 2014). In admonishing Christians to care for ecology, Russian Baptists, for example, appealed to the authority of the Bible and legislation of the Russian Federation (SCRUEB 2014). The Orthodox Church substantiated its attention to environment on the basis of Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition, with special reference to Church Fathers such as Maximus the Confessor, John Chrysostom, and Gregory of Nyssa (BSCROC 2000).

The Evangelicals and Orthodox agreed that all creation came from God, the Lord of all creation and the Chief Inspiration, to care for biodiversity and ecosystem on the planet. They also agreed that the so-called ecological crisis was created by man. It was essentially a moral issue, profoundly personal and spiritual (BSCRACEFP 2002; BSCROC 2000; Mumrikov 2013; RPECU 2018; SCRUEB 2014; SPPCR 2014). Thus, "The answers to many questions caused by the environmental crisis lie in the human soul, not in the spheres of economics, biology, technologies, or politics" (BSCRACEFP 2002).

Orthodox documents placed the ecological theme in the context of discussion of humans' dignity, freedom, and rights. "The realization of human rights should not lead to the degradation of the environment and depletion of natural resources" (ROCBTHDFR 2008). The Orthodox sources suggested that the Orthodox Church operates with corporate, public categories such as civilization, culture, and values, whereas Evangelicals were more focused on individual aspects of creation care, including personal responsibility of the believers and Christians' understanding of the biblical teaching on this theme (see RPECU 2018; SPPCR 2014).

While admitting that the root of the problem is in humans' hearts, a document of the Russian Orthodox Church criticized modern civilization in its preoccupation with luxurious lifestyle, enrichment, comfort, and consumerism (BSCROC 2000). Orthodox officials taught that the real and most effective alternative to consumerism is a Christian lifestyle based on moderation, sobriety, responsibility, refusal of excesses/luxuries, respect for the needs of other people and creatures, and understanding of spiritual values (PROC on Current Environmental Problems 2013). Similar accents were made by the Evangelicals (BSCRACEFP 2002).

Besides official Orthodox documents that outlined Christian ideas about ecology, a small number of contemporary Orthodox and Evangelical theologians and thinkers in

Russia and Ukraine spoke about it in their writings. Orthodox authors stressed that the solution to various ecological issues is rooted in the spiritual transformation of people (Bokotey et al. 2016; Schlenov and Petruschina 1999). Some conceptualized the issues of "Christianity and ecology" in connection with the Orthodox Ecclesiastic dogmatics (Ivanov 1990) or liturgy (Goricheva 2010; Khoruzhii 2014). It was strongly suggested that there is a conceptual link between ecology and Orthodox religious asceticism (Khoruzhii 2016).

Ryzhov (2013), a Russian evangelical psychologist and educator, argued that Christians must strengthen their ecological thinking and learn from a broader historical intellectual tradition of Protestant Reformation. Meleshko (2019), an evangelical theologian from Ukraine, even attempted to initiate the interfaith theological dialogue. As an Evangelical theologian and pastor, he paid attention to Eastern Orthodox theologians Alexander Schmemann and Dumitru Stăniloae to validate the point that all Christians should be responsible for creation care.

Specialized solid literature on Christian eco-theology and environmental leadership written by contemporary Russian and Ukrainian Evangelicals is almost absent. Meleshko explained this by stating, "Typically, in the perception of Evangelicals, care for the environment and worship of God are hardly linked into a coherent whole" (Meleshko 2013, p. 91). Thus, it is quite remarkable that the official document of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christian-Baptists stated that that Russian Baptists "consider the development of ecological theology as one of their social tasks aimed to fight ignorance and indifferent attitude that causes significant and often irreversible damage to the earthly environment that determines our lives and well-being" (SCRUEB 2014).

Some recent publications on eco-theology demonstrated that this is new for many Orthodox and Evangelicals. There were some attempts to develop eco-theology with a narrow confessional and even patriotic approach. For example, Alexander Evdokimov (2018), a Russian Orthodox professor in the department of theology at Moscow State Linguistic University, proposed quite a radical approach. He argued that the Orthodox eco-theological thinking must be based solely on the teaching of the Church and be autonomous from the influence of other Church traditions. In his view, non-Russian and non-Orthodox eco-theologians were developing an academic discipline that contributed little to the solution of environmental problems. Such non-Orthodox eco-theology did not help Orthodox Christians be more ethical and effective in their environmental responsibility (Evdokimov 2018, p. 420). In his view, there was no doubt that "Russia is the guarantor of spiritual and ecological balance on the planet" (Evdokimov 2012, p. 631). He believed that Russia was a spiritual leader in the world and that Orthodox Christianity was a proper ideology for the Russian state. He also recognized that the Russian Orthodox Church was a powerful symbol and instrument of contemporary Russian statehood and culture. It was quite obvious that the Russian Orthodox Church and state leaders often promoted the ancient Byzantine symphonic ideal, under which a strong cooperation between the Church and state is ideologically desirable (Knox 2003). Evdokimov's orthodox ecclesiastical ecological conciseness (Evdokimov 2012) presupposed that cooperation between the Church and state would benefit not only Russia, but the entire planet. He spoke in accord with Vishnyakov and Kisileva (2017), who argued Russia was a global spiritual leader, and to strengthen that position required the development and implementation of the new Russian ideology of the XXI century. They saw that this new Russian national ideology must be rooted in the ideological and ethical aspects of national ecologic conciseness. Evdokimov (2012) argued that the Orthodox ecological perspective should be taken as a national ideology and that this ideology would empower Russia to save the world.

4.2. Analysis and Findings from Interviews and Focus Groups

In the following paragraphs, we present and discuss the results of comparative analysis of the perspectives communicated in this research by Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox and Evangelical Christians.

The participants were asked to respond to seven research questions, and they could express their thoughts in more than one way. Thus, the total number of shared perspectives (responses) is not necessarily equal to the total number of participants. In our analysis, we compared the views of Evangelicals and Orthodox participants by paying attention to "themes", "categories", and "senses" evolved from interviews, and by calculating the percentage (weight) that each perspective (theme) received.

4.2.1. The Value of Nature and Animals

Effective and ethical environmental leadership presupposes that people place a high value on a balanced ecosystem (Clatworthy 1997; Helm 2016). So, the first question in this research interview—"What value does nature and animals have for humans and for you personally?"—was intended to show how Orthodox and Evangelicals understood the value of nature and animals. In general, Christians of both traditions fundamentally shared the belief that the main value of nature and animals was as a resource for satisfying the biological needs of humankind. This emphasis was made 21 times by Evangelicals (21% of total Evangelical responses) and 12 times by Orthodox participants (19% of total Orthodox responses). For example, one Evangelical interviewee said, "*The role of animals is to be our transport (like donkeys, horses), be our 'living canned food,' be materials for experiments. But animals haven't been promised eternal life. They don't have the 'superstructure' of the human spirit*". An Orthodox priest put it similarly, "*Nature was created for humans. Sun, sea, water, air, the earth that feeds the whole population of the planet,—these are the exceptional providence of God for a human*".

Some respondents said that nature's highest value is displayed in its inherent harmony, interdependence, and interconnectedness. This was emphasized 19 times by Evangelicals (19% of their responses) and 19 times by Orthodox (30% of their responses). Thus, ecological responsibility had to be directed toward all species of flora and fauna. Nothing could be excluded from care without causing harm and posing risks to the rest of God's creation. As one Orthodox interviewee said, "*The world is interrelated. If we stop being responsible for the environment, something (or not some, but many things) will lose its value, which will lead to the devaluation of other things. Everything is interrelated*".

Orthodox respondents noted four times that humans get to know and realize themselves due to nature and animals. In other words, an individual could not think of himself or herself in isolation from the rest of creation. This approach was enlightened in the following quote, "*Animals are life forms beside which a man can understand his peculiarity in God's eyes*". Consequently, not only was creation interrelated at the biological level, but also at the ontological one. Notice that this idea was completely absent in the responses of Evangelicals, which could reveal either or both their anthropocentric biases.

Evangelical and Orthodox Christians agreed in belief that God invited humans to be good stewards and coworkers with God in caring for creation. Thus, God's command to be stewards; i.e., to care for, watch over, cultivate, govern, and/or improve the earth "on behalf of God", was a great privilege. The idea was stressed three times by Evangelicals (12% of responses) and eight times by Orthodox (12.7% of responses). One Orthodox interviewee stated that, "*God could have created the whole nature, our Earth, in such a way that people shouldn't cultivate it . . . . But God commanded this task to us. If we look from this point of view, then nature should be very valuable to us*".

Some respondents argued that nature and animals are valuable simply because they are created by God (theocentric value). This emphasis was made nine times by Evangelicals (9% of responses) and 12 times by Orthodox (19% of responses). For example, an Orthodox interviewee noted that, "*All creation has great value because, if God created it, then from the perspective of God, everything that He created is valuable*".

4.2.2. Perspectives on the Ecological Situation

In our study, Orthodox and Evangelical Christians were asked to share their thoughts about the ecological situation in their country and in the world (research question #2), and how they felt about what is called the modern environmental crisis (question #3).

The vast majority of Evangelical and Orthodox Christians acknowledged the credibility and urgency of the ecological crisis. Evangelicals emphasized this 67 times (69.1% of all Evangelical responses) and Orthodox respondents 35 times (68.6% of Orthodox responses). To describe and characterize the ecological situation in their country and the world, respondents used words such as lamentable, catastrophic, dreadful, and critical. Ecological problems mentioned by the respondents were deforestation, climate change, global warming, the greenhouse effect, air pollution, contamination of water resources, contamination by radiation, and loss of biodiversity. One Evangelical interviewee said, "*Our ecology is rolling down and down, and I feel like in the near future our planet will turn into one big catastrophe where life is impossible*".

Responding to question #3—"How do you feel about what is called the modern environmental crisis?"—four participants responded more in theological terms. Three Orthodox priests noted that ecological crisis should be interpreted through the meaning of the Greek word "κρίσις" (judgement). One of them stated, "*Ecological crisis, judgment in the ecological sphere, is God's judgment upon us for the misuse of God's creation . . . . We should care for creation and not exploit it, not squeeze it like a lemon*". An Evangelical interviewee also linked the environmental crisis and the theme of God's judgement by saying, "*Ecological crisis is the consequence of the Fall. God intended humans—as the pinnacle of creation—to own it all, to wisely steward it. Sin has distorted the ecological system . . . . I think that it is impossible to solve this ecological problem without a return to God, regeneration, and salvation".*

This research showed that some Orthodox and Evangelicals in Russia and Ukraine believed that the problem of ecological crisis was overestimated. This point was made 11 times by Evangelicals (11.3% of responses) and eight times by Orthodox (15.7% of responses). For example, an Evangelical respondent said, "*I don't think that we have reached a crisis point yet. For the last 50–60 years, people have shouted that the crisis has come or is about to come very soon, or that we live amidst it . . . . I haven't experienced it firsthand nor do I have any fears".*

In addition, some Evangelical and Orthodox respondents were unsure whether the ecological crisis was real and whether Christians should be concerned about it. This was emphasized 10 times by Evangelicals (10.3%) and six times by the Orthodox (11.8%). Therefore, there were people among both Evangelical and Orthodox communities who either denied or doubted the credibility of the ecological crisis.

A small number of participants thought that the problem of ecological crisis was overestimated by politicians, media, and climate activists. They expressed personal negative attitudes toward the theme of ecological crisis and ecological responsibility in general. Such an attitude was expressed by 9.3% of Evangelical interviewees and by 4% of the Orthodox. For example, one Orthodox interviewee said, "*Some people use the topic of the ecological crisis for self-promotion. Just take this movement of Greta Thunberg . . . . It looks like self-promotion . . . but there are no specific actions".*

4.2.3. The Attitude of Contemporary Christians toward Nature and Environment

Lynn White Jr., in his well-known article "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" (White 1967), argued that ecological crisis is the result of Western Christianity's anthropocentrism in combination with the 19th-century synthesis of science and technology (see also Whitney 2015). In the West, this critique of Christianity prompted many to respond to White's thesis, which eventually led to the development of Christian ecotheology (Kerns 2004, p. 466). Although many theologians have demonstrated that Judeo-Christian Scriptures do not support exploitation of natural resources (Bauckham 2011; Moo and Moo 2018), it is not always clear whether Christians have positive and responsible attitudes toward nature and the environment. Thus, in this research participants were asked

(question #4) how they perceived the attitude of contemporary Christians (particularly in Russia and Ukraine) to nature and the environment.

Some respondents argued that the attitude of contemporary Christians to nature and environment is basically positive. This emphasis was made 21 times by Evangelicals (28.05% of Evangelical responses) and 11 times by Orthodox (26.19% of Orthodox responses). For example, an Evangelical interviewee said, "*I think that a religious person treats nature with care. At least so in my circle that I know the best. Because, when God is inside, in the heart and mind, then we have the right attitude toward things around us, our environment*". Similar responses were made by the Orthodox, but many of them demarcated the official position of the Church from the approach of individual believers. For example, an Orthodox interviewee noted, "*We should realize that there is an official position of the Church . . . but there are also billions of people who associate themselves with religion. The official position of the Church is basically pro-environmental, it insists on responsible consumption, it criticizes the ideology of consumerism. But people often behave in a different way*". Such an apparent tension between the official position of the Church and the praxis of individual members of the Church has not been stressed by Evangelical respondents. Perhaps it is somewhat difficult for Evangelicals to talk about an official position of the Church due to a local church autonomy concept that is shared by the majority of Evangelicals in Ukraine and Russia. They can talk only about a personal view and the attitude of individual Christians to the environment, whereas Orthodox Christians tend to evaluate the attitude of contemporary Christians based on the official position of the Church (documents, decisions of councils, doctrinal statements, works of the Apostolic Fathers, etc.).

Evangelicals are inclined to evaluate the attitude of contemporary Christians to the environment as indifferent to a much greater extent than Orthodox Christians. Such an attitude was emphasized 20 times by Evangelical interviewees (24.39% of responses) and only once by an Orthodox interviewee. Here are examples of the statements:

> "*Christians mainly deal with spiritual matters like the Gospel and saving people. But as for the environment—I haven't noticed that the Church pays much attention to this*". (Evangelical)

> "*Most Christians, 90% of them, don't think that ecological problems have relevance to Christianity and the spiritual sphere. Even 95% of them don't think about it*". (Evangelical)

> "*I haven't heard that this question was ever raised in the Churches. We, I think, are not ready for it yet*". (Evangelical)

> "*I think that Christians have many other concerns. First of all, caring for the ecology of their souls*". (Orthodox)

Some respondents argued that Christians in general have a negative attitude toward nature and the environment. Evangelicals made this emphasis 17 times (20.73% of responses) and Orthodox participants 15 times (35.71% of responses). One Orthodox priest stated that, "*Christians in the former Soviet Union don't think about it*". An Evangelical interviewee linked this fact with theology of Russian and Ukrainian Evangelicals, "*Contemporary Christians in Russia don't have an attitude about the environment and nature because this issue is in the area of theology*". Another Evangelical interviewee shared this view, "*I think that the theological paradigm, a worldview of Christians, implies that our main goal is to wait for Christ; that God is only in the Church, whereas the rest is about to fold and burn, which leads to the conclusion that—want it or not—nothing on earth has meaning*". Therefore, certain theological beliefs enhance the negative attitude of some Christians in Russia and Ukraine.

A noticeable number of interviewees said that Christians have the same attitude toward nature and environment as non-Christians. This was stressed 12 times by Evangelicals (14.6%) and four times by Orthodox (9.5%). This is how an Orthodox interviewee put it: "*I think that the attitude of Christians is the same as the attitude of non-Christians. If people are concerned with an ecological agenda, it is only because they are concerned with that ecological*

agenda, not because they are Christians. Theology is a secondary factor that should either affirm or deny their point of view".

It is quite interesting that 12% of Evangelical and 26% of Orthodox participants were not able to comment on the attitude of other Christians toward nature and environment. Some were reluctant to comment on what other people think or do. Others acknowledged that they simply do not know. This research also revealed that Evangelical and Orthodox Christians in Russia and Ukraine know very little about specific ongoing local or global interfaith dialogues and initiatives related to creation care.

4.2.4. Perspectives on the Concept of Creation Care

Participants were asked about their understanding of the concept of creation care in research question #5. In many Christian circles today, creation care is understood as Christians' response to the Gospel as a part of the Christian proclamation of Good News (Creation Care and the Gospel: Jamaica Call to Action 2012).

Most interviewees asserted that creation care should be demonstrated in active work to protect and conserve the environment such as tree planting, sorting waste, making a personal contribution to the conservation of the environment, animal welfare, or education of other people to care for creation. This was accentuated 37 times by Evangelical (60.66% of their responses) and 10 times by Orthodox (25% of their responses) interviewees. Examples include:

> "*To care about what is around us. Birds, animals, water, ground, etc*". (Orthodox)

> "*For me personally, care for the Earth is when you give something, not only receive*". (Orthodox)

> "*Creation care begins with us, yet we also should make some impact to motivate other people*". (Evangelical)

Some Evangelical and Orthodox Christians shared the belief that the idea of creation care consisted in not harming nature, or passive care for creation ("don't harm", "don't litter", "don't kill", etc.). Such belief was noted 19 times by Evangelicals (31.15%) and six times by Orthodox (15%). According to one Evangelical interviewee, "*Care for creation begins when we are not harming nature. This is caring—when I personally don't harm nature. When I go camping, I always take garbage bags with me to clean up after myself. This protects nature. I don't do unlawful things to nature, like felling trees*". Per the research, Evangelicals were more inclined to understand creation care in terms of passive activity; i.e., not doing anything that harms.

A good number of Orthodox interviewees understood creation care as environmental stewardship considering the Creator's command to care for creation. Although some Evangelicals were aware of the theological interpretation of creation care, this category weighed stronger in the answers of the Orthodox interviewees. Orthodox participants emphasized this 24 times (60% of responses), whereas only five times was this emphasis made by Evangelicals (8.20% of responses). Following are several examples:

> "*The Lord says: 'Cultivate the paradise.' What does it mean? To take care of it, not simply benefit from it*". (Orthodox)

> "*Care of creation is God's command, and we have to take this responsibility before God. We should do everything to help creation fulfill the plan of our Creator*". (Orthodox)

> "*This is the biblical truth that God initially gave to Adam when he placed him in the garden of Eden. He gave him the command to not only be fruitful and multiply . . . but also to take care, improve, cultivate. Cultivation has to do with improvement. After all, it is about caring for the place where God put us*". (Evangelical)

Although Evangelical and Orthodox Christians understood creation care in similar terms, their responses contained different emphases—Orthodox Christians tended to emphasize theological aspects of creation care, whereas Evangelical Christians focused on active forms of work to protect the environment.

4.2.5. Personal Environmental Leadership

Research question #6 asked respondents to share how they personally cared for creation. The aim of this question was to identify whether and how the respondents practiced environmental leadership and, thus, implemented what they believed concerning the idea of creation care.

Some interviewees indicated that they tried to not harm nature by their work and daily routine activities. This was emphasized by 56% of Evangelicals (of 101 interviewees) and by 25% of Orthodox (of 50 interviewees). For example, an Orthodox interviewee said, "*First and foremost, I start with myself. I try to not litter outdoors when camping*". A similar response was made by an Evangelical respondent: "*When our church organizes outdoor camp, we always leave that place clean after we finish. A forest ranger once told us, 'Your camp has 200 people, but when you leave, it is cleaner than after 2–3 other people that come'*".

Some respondents said that they actively care for creation: tree planting; sorting waste; growing or buying natural, eco-friendly, anti-pollutant plants; caring for animals; or engaging in agriculture (planting a vegetable garden). This trajectory was taken by 27% of Evangelicals and 32% of Orthodox participants. A few participants mentioned that they volunteer for projects related to environmental conservation and animal welfare (2% Evangelicals and 10% Orthodox). It is important to note that activism, as the expression and demonstration of the gospel in missionary and social reform efforts, is one of the four primary characteristics of evangelicalism (Bebbington 1989).

The research showed that there was some inconsistency in the responses of Evangelicals. While many of them stated that creation care for Christians meant to be personally involved in it (sorting waste, tree planting, etc.), speaking about their personal engagement in care for creation, 56% of Evangelicals admitted that they cared for creation only in passive forms. Less than half of Evangelicals practiced what they believed.

Some respondents shared that personal environmental leadership could be accomplished through education, parenting, preaching, leading by example, and everything that influences people to care for creation. Four percent of Evangelicals and 27% of Orthodox interviewees stated this point. Strikingly, a significant portion of Orthodox interviewees stressed that their responsibility was not only to act alone, but also to inform, convince, inspire, and involve other people in creation care. Here are two statements that represented their position:

> "*From my position as a teacher, philosopher, Christian . . . I try to contribute to the public discourse the following idea: if I think in Christian categories, it should be natural for me to think in categories of care for the environment*". (Orthodox)

> "*As a priest, I regularly say in my sermon that a person's lifestyle and attitude toward nature is the evidence of what is in his or her soul*". (Orthodox)

4.2.6. Eco-Faith and Eco-Hermeneutics

To what extent do Evangelical and Orthodox Christians in Russia and Ukraine connect ecological themes with their sources of their faith? What ecological hermeneutical strategies do they use? These enquiries were behind the seventh research question that we asked our participants; i.e., what the Bible says concerning nature and animals (question #7). The researchers were open to hearing the ecological perspectives of the interviewees based on other religious sources important to their faith tradition. The analysis of the responses helped to identify six features in the eco-theological and eco-hermeneutical landscape: (1) theology of Creation and creation care; (2) ecological sin; (3) eco-theology in the Old Testament; (4) eco-theology in Jesus and the Gospels; (5) eco-eschatology; and (6) Bible, tradition, and eco-hermeneutics.

Theology of Creation and Creation Care

Most participants stated that the first two chapters of Genesis say a lot about nature and animals. This was noted by 46% of Orthodox participants and 40% of Evangelicals. Some added that God commanded people to care for creation when he created the world.

Four Orthodox interviewees linked the Genesis creation narrative with the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of theosis/deification (on both personal and cosmic levels) by using the theory of evolution as a bridge between the two. In their perspective, Christians should engage in active care for creation because personal transformation of believers is inseparable from the ultimate transformation of the universe. For example, an Orthodox priest from Ukraine said:

> "*When a human-like creature came to the realization that it was no longer an animal but was similar to God and began searching for God, at that moment we read their names mentioned in the second chapter of Genesis . . . . Only those people who realized their intelligence, who had a choice, have names. If we have separated ourselves and become the pinnacle of creation, then we will always be part of the animal world and part of the Divine world. If a man achieves holiness, he transforms his part of the animal world, inspires it, and thus accomplishes deification. Through this deification the whole animal world will be transformed*".

A similar idea was expressed by another Orthodox interviewee: "*A man is such a microcosm—through his life, he leads the earth to salvation*".

Ecological Sin

The Bible indicates that original sin has negatively affected creation in some ways, yet it is still good and splendid (see Ps. 8; 104) but at the same time corrupted (Gen. 3:17; Rom. 8:22). From a Christian perspective, sin could be understood as structural violence, because it describes different systems of oppression, including ecological destruction (Conradie 2020, pp. 5–6).

Our research showed that Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox and Evangelical Christians did not explicitly express that there was a strong link between the Christian doctrine of original sin and contemporary problems of environmental devastation, environmental injustice, and widespread consumerism. The respondents rarely mentioned original sin (the Fall of man) as a factor that damaged creation. In fact, this was mentioned by only 5% of Evangelical interviewees and 9% of Orthodox participants. One Evangelical respondent said, "*From the moment of our wrongdoing, the ground will produce thorns and thistles*". Of all 151 participants, there was only one interviewee, a Ukrainian Orthodox priest, who tied the Christian doctrine of original sin with the current ecological crisis. He stated:

> "*When the Fall happened, everything turned upside down . . . . Sin changed everything completely (even things that seemed to be under humans' submission) and came to the world through a man. And that is why everything should be fixed by a man. Because of this, Christ is the new Adam who came to set us free from sin, curse, death. Indeed, he set us free*".

Thus, in general it is hard to say if the study's participants would strongly agree with Becker (1992) in the argument that the Christian doctrine of original sin helped clarify Christian understanding of the present ecological crisis (p. 153). It is quite peculiar that in our study only a few respondents mentioned the Christian doctrine of sin. This may suggest that these Christians in Ukraine and Russia tended to separate private religious matters from broader environmental issues and/or their eco-theological conscience operated without interconnecting the doctrine of original sin with the contemporary state of ecology.

Eco-Theology in the Old Testament

Sometimes, within or outside Christian circles, the opinion is voiced that the Bible is indifferent toward the environment or that environmental ethics are largely absent from the Bible, especially in the Old Testament. These positions were not shared by the participants of this research. The study showed that Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox and Evangelical Christians believed that many Old Testament passages were not indifferent toward the environment and helped to avoid anthropocentrism in the ecological debate.

Speaking about animals and nature in the Bible, the interviewees in this study made references to various Old Testament books (by 28% of Evangelicals and 32% of Orthodox). A number of biblical passages were cited only once either by Evangelical or Orthodox respondents. For example, they mentioned the sun standing still in the book of Joshua (Joshua 10), clothes and diet of the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 1:8), Jonah's being in the belly of a great fish (Jonah 1-2), and the prophet Daniel's sojourn at the bottom of the den of lions (Daniel 6).

Several Old Testament narratives were mentioned by the respondents from both faith traditions. Three Evangelical and three Orthodox interviewees mentioned the Old Testament story of Noah (Genesis 6-9), especially the building of the ark and the Great Flood. For example, an Orthodox interviewee said:

> "*I will refer to the story of Noah. The Bible demonstrates that when it comes to salvation, this also implies care for various animals, their salvation, because they live in the same world with humans. This means that the well-being and life of humans is impossible without the lives of other living creatures. We share the same creation and, in a sense, have the same future . . . . The question of the salvation of people touches the issues of how we can preserve and continue the happy and safe existence of other creatures*".

Another Orthodox respondent stated, "*God loves not only humans but also everything that he created. And Noah built that ship not only for himself as a selfish man, but also for animals that were saved there with him*".

In total, seven Evangelical and four Orthodox respondents mentioned Old Testament laws and regulations related to nature and animals. One Evangelical interviewee paraphrased Deuteronomy 20:19-20 as, "*When you wage war, don't destroy trees*". As another example, an Orthodox priest alluded to Leviticus 25 and said, "*The earth is God's property and, according to the Bible, nobody can own it permanently. One can use and cultivate it for a limited period of time. Every seven years people should give the earth rest to be restored*".

Eight Evangelical and nine Orthodox referred to Psalms and Proverbs that contained ideas related to nature, animals, and creation care. For example, an Evangelical respondent paraphrased the text from Proverbs 12:10: "*The righteous person cares even about cattle*".

Several Orthodox interviewees argued that liturgical practice has helped them remember certain passages of Scriptures associated with nature and the animal world. One such example was, "*Every evening service in the Orthodox liturgy begins with the reading of Psalm 104 in which David, as a prophet, was very excited and talked about the creation of the world*".

Eco-Theology in Jesus and the Gospels

It is noteworthy that not many interviewees in this study linked the themes of nature, creation, and creation care with the person of Jesus Christ and/or referred to the Gospels to express this connection. Only three Evangelicals and nine Orthodox stated this emphasis. All references to Jesus could be divided into two categories: (1) Jesus' interaction with nature; and (2) nature in Jesus's teaching. The following response of an Orthodox interviewee served as an example of this first category: "*In the Gospels, we see how many times the Lord calmed the storm before his disciples*". An Evangelical interviewee response illustrated the second category: "*Christ gave many examples derived from his observations of Israel's agrarian life . . . . Apparently, God gave the earth to us as an example and object for our observations. Looking at plants and animals, we, among other things, explore the Creator's character*".

Only one interviewee (from 151 participants in this study)—an Orthodox priest—made a theological connection between creation and the death/resurrection of Jesus: "*Everything had to be restored by man, which is why Christ is the new Adam who came to set us free from sin, curse, and death. And he did it. The Lord himself said it in his sermons*". Perhaps the fact that only one interviewee mentioned Jesus as savior of the universe suggests that Evangelical and Orthodox Christians in Ukraine and Russia rarely view ecological problems in light of Jesus' redemptive ministry of salvation; i.e., his plan to heal, bring peace, rescue, reconcile, and restore creation. This means that in the eco-theological consciences of Orthodox and Evangelicals in Russia and Ukraine, there predominates a so-called anthropocentric bias;

i.e., a bias that presupposes that humans are the most important part of God's creation. This bias devaluates the other-than-human creation in God's redemption through Jesus Christ.

Eco-Eschatology

Modern biblical scholars argued that Christian eschatology was essential to creation care (Kelly 2015; Moo 2006; Williams 2018), but certain eschatological beliefs, such as premillennial dispensationalism, could discourage Christians from caring for creation (Snyder 2011, p. 55). Basically, Christian eschatology refers to the Second Coming of Christ (Parousia), Final Judgement, resurrection, and the restoration of creation (Noble 2015; Thiselton 2015, p. 382).

Most Orthodox Christians in this study did not think about creation care, environmental issues, nature, and animals in terms of anticipation of an eschatological wholeness to a broken creation. Eschatological texts were mentioned only by 17 interviewees total. Among Orthodox interviewees, one priest from Ukraine mentioned the book of Revelation. He said, "*Revelation teaches that everything will be renewed . . . . Salvation lies not only in the salvation of individual humans (or humanity at all), but in the whole creation, including nature*". The other 16 references to various eschatological biblical texts were made by Evangelicals: Isaiah 11:6 (mentioned 4 times); Romans 8:22 (8 times); 2 Peter 3:10 (5 times); and Revelation (8 times).

Evangelical participants revealed different eschatological positions. Some held a premillennial view. For example, two evangelical interviewees connected Romans 8:22 with the concept of the Millennial kingdom. One stated:

> "*I know that the whole creation groans and waits for the revelation of the sons of God . . . . The redemption of the whole creation will take place when humanity is redeemed . . . . Most likely, it is about the Millennial kingdom because the earth and all works will be burned up by that time*".

Another evangelical pastor interpreted 2 Peter 3:10 literally and said, "*The earth and all works will be burned up, and this is fact. But this does not free us from the responsibility for implementation of the first and second commandments*". Premillennial eschatology is quite common among Evangelicals in Russia and Ukraine. Mokienko (2018) argued that this helped explain a weak environmental concern among Pentecostals in Ukraine (p. 265).

Of course, some Evangelicals admitted that they did not agree with a literal interpretation of 2 Peter 3:10, but believed that in the future the earth will be renewed through God's redemptive work, and that those who did not care for creation will be punished by God. Here are several examples of this viewpoint:

> "*As for the texts that say that all works on earth will be burned up, I think that they are imagery and not suggesting that the earth will be destroyed by fire at the end of times. The passages that talk about the new heavens and the new earth do not imply that everything will be brand new. What we have now will be renewed in the future, which is why we should care for it with the understanding that it will be renewed*".

> "*I admit that God's wrath will be on those who are careless about nature and destroy it*".

> "*The making of the new heaven and new earth will be completed with the transformation of the old creation into new. Ecology and other things will work as they should on the new earth. And we should do everything we can to accelerate the fulfilling of this prophecy*".

Bible, Tradition, and Eco-Hermeneutics

Participants in this study had distinct hermeneutical and theological frameworks related to their understanding of authoritative foundations for their faith and practice (Antonenko 2004; Breck 2001; Dobykin 2016; Florovsky 1972; Likhosherstov 2013; Negrov 2002, 2006, 2008; Puzynin 2012; Stylianopoulos 1997). In this research, it was noted that in expressing personal theological perspectives on ecology and ecological responsibility,

Evangelical interviewees mainly concentrated on the biblical texts and used literal understanding of the Bible, while Orthodox respondents made references to the writings of the Church Fathers and used allegorical (figurative) understanding of biblical passages that they cited. The following three paragraphs highlight the Orthodox viewpoints.

Church Tradition is essential to Eastern Orthodoxy, and therefore the respondents of this tradition illustrated their eco-theological perspectives by mentioning the writings of Church Fathers and/or experience/example of the Orthodox monastics and the just. Several respondents mentioned Seraphim of Sarov, Sergius of Radonezh, Gerasimus of the Jordan, Mary of Egypt, Silouan the Athonite, and Isaac of Nineveh. It was quite interesting that the Orthodox interviewees did not mention Maximus the Confessor, whose theological perspectives on creation are suggested to be relevant for the present ecological crisis (Bordeianu 2009; Jenkins 2008). Among the modern Orthodox spiritual leaders, four interviewees cited the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, known for his proenvironmental position (Bartholomew 2015; Chryssavgis 2003), and who is often called the Green Patriarch (Theokritoff 2017).

One of the interviewees, an Orthodox priest from Ukraine, connected the example of the saints with the idea of creation's interconnectedness. He noted, "*Seraphim of Sarov was in harmony and communication with God, which is why he always maintained harmony with God's creation, nature. Therefore, everything is connected and by no means can be divided*".

Five Orthodox interviewees (10% of all Orthodox participants) articulated their eco-theological ideas with the help of figurative interpretations of several biblical texts. For example, one Orthodox priest recounted the story of a Canaanite woman in the Gospel of Matthew 15:21-28. He interpreted the words of this woman—*"Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table"* (v. 27 NIV) as follows, "*In this passage Jesus compares dogs with the non-Jewish nations that are no less valuable than the Jewish people. Thus, for Jesus, the animals are also valuable*". Another Orthodox interviewee indicated that God's creation should be harmonious. This he concluded from the fact that Jesus cursed the fig tree (Mark 11:12-14, 20-25). He stated that the "*poor harvest of the fig tree is a sign of the broken ecological harmony, which leads to and results from the curse. The initial plan of God for the whole creation was to be harmonious and fruitful*". Yet another Orthodox priest from Ukraine made this statement, "*Nature is also involved in salvation of humans because Jesus died on the cross made of wood*". We are not suggesting that these remarks of Orthodox respondents misinterpret biblical text. The point we want to make is that the Evangelical interviewees expressed their eco-theological perspectives by mentioning biblical texts without proposing various deeper levels of meanings to those texts.

5. Conclusions

This research has shown that Evangelical and Orthodox Christians in Russia and Ukraine were able to express basic eco-theological Christian ideas, but their eco-theological framework was not yet fully developed. While most Evangelical and Orthodox participants recognized that the ecological situation in the world and their countries was unpleasant, less than 35% of all respondents actively practiced environmental leadership.

There are various trajectories in how Evangelical and Orthodox Christians understand the connection between religion and ecology. On the one hand, their religious beliefs provide the framework for their perception of theory and practice of Christian environmental leadership. Most respondents demonstrated the knowledge of how the Bible corresponds with the ecological crisis and other environmental issues. They shared the belief that the natural world is good since it was created by God, who commanded humans care for a balanced biodiversity and ecosystems.

On the other hand, there are a few factors that impede the development of environmental leadership among Evangelicals and Orthodox in Russia and Ukraine. First, many Christians believe that the value of nature and animals lies in satisfying the physical needs of men and women. This utilitarian and anthropocentric view has little to do with the Bible and/or Christian tradition and rather is rooted in the modernistic worldview. It also

rotted in the anthropocentric view of the salvific work of Christ and in the anthropocentric eschatological perspectives. Second, although most Evangelical and Orthodox Christians believed that the idea of creation care was rooted in the Bible and/or Holy Tradition, only a small number of them agreed that Christians were responsible for practicing and developing environmental leadership. It was especially seen in the responses of Evangelical Christians, who often insisted on the idea that Christians should preach the Gospel and save souls instead of caring for creation. Third, several Evangelical and Orthodox Christians in Russia and Ukraine were skeptical of claims and actions that came from environmentalists, climate activists, and politicians, and thus associated creation care with secular political agendas.

This study revealed that the Evangelical and Orthodox perspectives on eco-theology and environmental leadership can enrich interfaith dialogues and boost meaningful projects related to creation care. Needless to say, environmental issues cannot be addressed by individuals and/or fragmented communities. Of course, it is difficult to foresee that the high-ranking Church leaders, especially in Russia, would urge cooperation between the Evangelicals and Orthodox in fostering eco-theological discussions that will advance effective environmental leadership. Yet, in Ukraine, there are several academic communities that exemplify the willingness for meaningful dialogues and connections between the Evangelical and Orthodox theologians and practitioners (especially, the Department of Theology and Religious Studies of the MP Dragomanov National Pedagogical University, the Open Orthodox University of St. Sophia the Wisdom, and the Eastern European Institute of Theology).

This article's aims were to compare the perspectives of the Orthodox and Evangelical Christians in Russia and Ukraine related to eco-theology and environmental leadership. The article fills the existing gap on the topic and lays the foundation for further inquiry. It is obvious that other studies should pay attention to several urgent and important questions:

- Can/should eco-theology become part of mainstream Orthodox and Evangelical theology in Russia and Ukraine? Or should Evangelicals and Orthodox accept that ecological issues will remain on the periphery of their theological thinking and community service?
- To what extent can anthropocentrism be avoided in the ecological hermeneutics and eco-spirituality within Evangelical and Orthodox traditions?
- Can/should environmental leadership of Russian and Ukrainian Evangelicals and Orthodox be considered/developed as an integral part of God's mission and the mission of the Church?
- How can/should Christian eco-theology equip Evangelical and Orthodox believers in Russia and Ukraine to be effective and ethical leaders that take seriously the task of environmental responsibility in their communities and beyond?

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Note

[1] In this article, we use the term "Orthodox Christians" to refer to the religious adherants of the existing independent Orthodox Churches in Ukraine and Russia. The term "Evangelicals" is used to denote those who belong to various Russian and Ukrainian Baptist, Pentecostal, and charismatic congregations.

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Discipleship in Oriental Orthodox and Evangelical Communities

Ralph Lee

Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, Oxford OX2 6HR, UK; rlee@ocms.ac.uk

Abstract: In many countries with a strong Orthodox Christian presence there are tensions between Evangelicals and Orthodox Christians. These tensions are rooted in many theological, ecclesiological, and epistemological differences. In practice, one of the crucial causes of tension comes down to different practical understandings of what a Christian disciple looks like. This paper examines key aspects of discipleship as expressed in revival movements in Orthodox Churches Egypt, India and Ethiopia which are connected to the challenges presented by the huge expansion of Evangelical Protestant mission from the nineteenth century. Key aspects will be evaluated in comparison with aspects that are understood to characterize disciples in Evangelical expressions, including: differing understandings of the sacraments and their place in the life of a disciple; ways in which different traditions engage with the Bible and related literary works; contrasting outlooks on discipleship as an individual and a community way of life; and differing understanding of spiritual disciplines.

Keywords: discipleship; Orthodox Christian; Oriental Christian; Coptic; Egypt; Ethiopia; India

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1. Introduction

Evangelical Christianity and non-Chalcedonian or Oriental Orthodox Christianity have moved along very different historical trajectories. This divergence is marked by major events including the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE, the Great Schism of 1054 CE then the Reformation in the sixteenth century with later divisions within Protestant Christianity. The non-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches of Egypt, Ethiopia and India are embedded in diverse non-Western cultures which have passed by the specific religious challenges which the Enlightenment presented to Protestant and Catholic Christianity and have faced their own intellectual and practical challenges. This study explores important observed behaviors of those devoutly following Christ, that is 'disciples', and contrasts them with their Evangelical counterparts seeking to look at the reasons behind behaviors and tracing them to a historical understanding discipleship.

2. Historical Background

The Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE produced significant divisions in the Church. Its Christological definition has been understood as the definition of middle ground between a perceived splitting of humanity and divinity attributed to Nestorius that was condemned at Ephesus in 431 CE, and the teaching of Eutyches who was understood to argue that Christ was consubstantial only with the Father. This model does not serve well the Christology of Christian traditions that developed outside of the Roman Empire, exemplified by Severus of Antioch who presented a robust defense of the Oriental outlook and raised serious issues with the Chalcedonian definition (Chesnut 1976; Allen and Hayward 2004). Sebastian Brock, among others, has argued strongly for a distinction between Eutyches' 'monophysite' teaching and 'miaphysite' Christology which affirms full humanity and divinity in one nature of Christ without division or confusion, noting that terms like 'nature' and 'hypostasis' had several different understandings which became more ambiguous when translated into Syriac (Brock 1996). Similar problems may be

found with other ancient languages, such as the Classical Ethiopic. The outcome of the Council of Chalcedon left a painful split in the church and significant efforts were made to reconcile the sides. Emperor Zeno (474-5, 476-91CE) authorized what became known as the *Henoticon*, or 'act of union,' which avoided criticism of Leo's Tome that had caused difficulty for the Alexandrians, but also rejected on one extreme Nestorianism, which the Egyptians, Palestinians and Syrians had felt was given too much concession at Chalcedon, and Eutyches and his monophysite teaching on the other, but also avoided the 'two natures' formula that the Alexandrians opposed strongly (Grillmeier 1987, pp. 247–317). The *Henoticon* failed as a compromise lacking clarity, and strong opposition endured in Egypt, Palestine and Syria (Grillmeier 1987, p. 257). There were concerted efforts to resolve the differences, although for the opposers of Chalcedon its outlook remained a concession to Nestorianism that they could not accept. A series of synods and documents aimed at clarifying and resolving differences, culminated in the 5th Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 553 CE (noting that this Council is not accepted as 'ecumenical' by the Oriental Churches), which sought a Christological definition that was resolutely against Nestorianism, but all this was insufficient (Grillmeier 1995, pp. 443–61). The challenges of understanding Oriental Christology point to much broader challenges in understanding the beliefs and practices of these Christian expressions. Important developments were made in the 20th century and significant progress has been made in understanding the fundamental congruence between Chalcedonian and Oriental views (Chaillot 2016) which must be understood as removing many perceived obstacles to good relations between these groups. Significant divergence in experience comes, however, from the very different histories of the three Oriental traditions in this study.

Coptic Christianity was formed in the very earliest years of the Christian Church. Coptic Christians celebrate the Holy Family fleeing to Egypt from Herod's slaughter of the innocents, and the foundation of their church by St Mark, believed to have been martyred in Alexandria perhaps in 68 CE (Pearson 2006, pp. 336–37). Alexandria became one of the most important Christian intellectual centers, and Egypt was an early and influential center for the development of monasticism (Pearson 2006). It was the strong influence of the Egyptian countryside rather than its more Hellenized cities that drove opposition to Chalcedon, rejection of which partly contributed to the waning of Alexandrian theological influence within the Roman Empire (Gillman and Klimkeit 1999, p. 16). Since the seventh century Arab invasions of North Africa, and then later Ottoman Islamic culture the Coptic Church has lived under Islamic rule (Pearson 2006; O'Mahony 2006), and Islamic presence has strongly influenced the development of its Christian reflection.

Ethiopian Orthodoxy flourished early. The Ethiopians look to their Christian origins in the baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch by Peter in Acts 8, even though this figure almost certainly served in the Meroitic Kingdom in Nubia (Ullendorff [1968] 2006, p. 1), but they have identified the Candace as the Queen of Sheba (Lee 2017b, p. 2). Furthermore, the Ethiopians appeal to Käsäte Bərhan Abbā Sälämā, their 'revealer of light, father of peace' St Frumentius (d. c.383), a Syrian Christian who was ordained as Ethiopia's first bishop possibly in 328 CE by St Athanasius. This connection is attested by Rufinus (Migne 1849, cols. 478–80; Amidon 1997, pp. 18–20), but most convincingly in a letter by Athanasius (1892). The Bible and liturgy were translated into Ethiopia's classical language by the fifth century, then growing independently and somewhat isolated because of the Arab invasions. Ethiopian Christianity has developed a remarkable presence in even the nation's most isolated mountainous regions, and although it was subject for centuries to the Patriarch in Alexandria, until 1959, its use of the vernacular saw the development of a distinctive expression of Christianity, with its own strong liturgical and intellectual traditions (Isaac 2012, pp. 1–26; Crummey 2006; Binns 2017).

Indian Christianity has a complex past with a very early Christian expression formed under the strong influence of a dominant Hindu culture. The Indian Orthodox link their Christian foundations to the Apostle Thomas, narrated in oral history in Malayalam songs such as 'Margam Kali Puttu,' 'Song of the Way,' and scholars are increasingly persuaded

of this claim (Gillman and Klimkeit 1999, pp. 159–66). A connection with Persia emerged probably from the fourth century, accounting for the Indian adoption of Syriac as its liturgical language (Gillman and Klimkeit 1999, pp. 166–77). Persian links remained strong until the Church was subject to harsh dominance by the Roman Catholic church with the severe and destructive Synod of Diamper in 1599 CE at which many of its cultural outlooks were anathematized, and later emerging through alliances with the Syrian Church bringing it into the non-Chalcedonian group of churches (Gillman and Klimkeit 1999, pp. 155–202; O'Mahony and Angold 2006).

These Orthodox expressions are strongly embedded within their cultures, leading to censure by Western Christians rooted in poor understanding of their non-Chalcedonian but also non-Eutychian Christology: the Egyptians have adopted the Arabic language and culture of their historical rulers becoming a significant force in shaping the development of Egyptian culture over many centuries, but have been criticized by Western Christians for neglecting the call to Evangelize their Muslim compatriots (Cragg 1992, pp. 13–30, etc.); the Ethiopian Church has a strong claim to being the primary force shaping and forming its national culture since the fourth century CE, but has been criticized for its 'Judaic' customs, without carefully considering how they are understood within the Church (Lee 2017a; Ullendorff [1968] 2006); and accusations of syncretism have been made against the Indian Orthodox because of their outward conformity to Hindu culture, which may also be viewed as contextualization par excellence (Gillman and Klimkeit 1999, pp. 177–202). An exception to this critical western outlook were Anglican missionaries who viewed these Christians as potential partners in mission: in the nineteenth century the Church Mission Society (CMS) specifically aimed at keeping the Coptic Church as the national church of Egypt (Sharkey 2008, pp. 33–34); around 1815 the English considered the Syrian Christians of India as potential evangelists for of Asia and supported the establishment of a seminary in Kerala (Varghese 2010, p. 227); and in from the earliest days of CMS in Ethiopia their missionaries sought to build a good relationship with the head of the Ethiopian Church and eschewed planting churches (Hastings 1996, p. 224).

The CMS outlook needs a full examination which is beyond the scope of this article, but it points to what this article seeks to explore: what might we observe in these Christian communities that indicates their commitment to discipleship? Enduring extended harsh treatment, facing strong cultural challenges, and strengthening in the face of strong Protestant and Catholic missionary efforts from the nineteenth century are compelling signs. From the nineteenth century these churches have seen a revival of spiritual life expressed in church attendance, and in the flourishing of aspects of spiritual life that characterize the life of Christian disciples. As the historical and cultural discontinuity between non-Chalcedonian and Evangelical Christians is wide, some aspects of Orthodox discipleship may be unclear to Evangelicals and vice versa. This study explores important observed behaviors of those devoutly following Christ and contrasts them with their Evangelical counterparts seeking to look at the reasons behind behaviors and tracing them to historical discipleship.

3. Defining and Discerning Discipleship

Discipleship is living out of the imitation of Christ in the life of a Christian believer, following the pattern of Jesus' first followers, or 'disciples.' The Greek μαθητής, 'disciple', in the New Testament, is found only in the Gospels and Acts and is associated with one who formally and informally learns spiritual practice from another (Bauer et al. 2000, p. 609). It may relate to developing Christian character that will produce certain behaviors, summarized well in a passage like Gal 5:22–23 (NRSV) 'the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.' It also involves developing new ways of thinking in line with God's revelation, again expected to bring about a change in behavior, as expressed in Rom 12:2 (NRSV), 'Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.'

The Navigators, an Evangelical Christian organization with a strong focus on practical discipleship, has articulated what it seeks to do develop in Christian disciples referring to things such as: the passion to know, love and become like Jesus Christ; believing in the truth and sufficiency of the Scriptures for the whole of life; the transforming power of the Gospel; the leading and empowering of the Holy Spirit; living with expectant faith and persevering prayer rooted in the promises of God; the dignity and value of every person' love and grace expressed among us in community; forming families and relational networks that seek to make disciples in many nations (The Navigators UK 2017). This is not intended to be a complete definition of discipleship, but it seeks to go beyond outward conforming with a focus on the Bible, life changing experience, and sharing that experience with others as lying at the very center of Christian discipleship and is perhaps a good starting point for understanding discipleship in Evangelical expressions.

These brief examples from Paul, and also the Navigators' definition point to a concern for the transforming nature of Christian faith. Outward and measurable signs in Evangelical communities might include practices such as regular Bible reading, perhaps memorizing motivating or comforting verses from the Bible, prayer, sharing faith with those who are not Christians, etc. Christians from diverse expressions would share much of this outlook but for others this individualistic approach may be found wanting. For Evangelical traditions with a stronger liturgical emphasis, and for the Catholic and Orthodox communities, there are some obvious omissions: The Church is not mentioned, 'tradition' is also omitted, and the place in discipleship of sacraments is overlooked. In considering how this outlook might be developed for Orthodox Christians the author, with other representatives of the Navigators sought to reword the definition to address these deficiencies with wording such as: the truth and sufficiency of God's revelation, given through His body, the Church, for the whole of life. Following this, some observable characteristics of Orthodox disciples need to be defined.

4. Characteristics of Spiritual Revival and Discipleship in Orthodox Communities

After centuries of oppression and serious limitations on daily life under Islamic rule, in the early nineteenth century the Coptic Church found many of its members and clergy with little understanding of their Christian faith (Miyokawa 2017). Coincidentally Protestant and Catholic missions began to gain influence, primarily through education, stimulating strong reflection within the Coptic Church on the life of its members, and so catalyzing significant spiritual revival through into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In observing the outward signs of this revival, Anthony O'Mahony has articulated a list of characteristics that provide a basis for assessing aspects of discipleship in Orthodox communities:

> 'A major characteristic of the Coptic revival is a renewed emphasis on the monastic and ecclesial traditions. This is realized in more frequent celebrations of the Eucharist, stress on the church's identity as an Apostolic church, renewed emphasis on the study of the Coptic language, commemoration of the glorious past, on Egypt as the homeland of monasticism, reading of the Church Fathers, and upholding martyrdom, even in the present day. At the same time, the church has attempted to restore the practice of certain sacraments which were beginning to fall into oblivion, such as the sacrament of reconciliation, or fasting, particularly honored in the Coptic religious tradition.' (O'Mahony 2006, p. 506).

O'Mahony's description usefully highlights aspects of Orthodox discipleship that contrast somewhat with Evangelical practice. For Evangelicals more individualistic practices such as personal bible reading, or individual elements of Christian character come more to the fore, whereas within the Orthodox outlook much of the drive for discipleship will come directly through the ministry of the Church. The Scriptures are at the heart of Orthodox discipleship but will be accompanied by reading the Church Fathers and other ancient Christian literature. Such literature underpins Orthodox understanding of Scripture, but this may be obscured from Evangelical eyes. An emphasis on the monastic tradition is also something that, seen through Evangelical eyes, may seem a diversion, but from an

Orthodox perspective discipleship will engage closely with the monastic community for teaching, spiritual guidance. Monastics will frequently have the role of Spiritual Fathers in a mentoring relationship that lies at the heart of Orthodox discipleship.

4.1. Sunday School Movements

Teaching is an important feature of discipleship across the traditions, and Egyptian, Ethiopian, and Indian Orthodox churches have all responded to challenges through establishing Sunday School organizations focused on giving spiritual instruction, especially to young people. These have partly been responses to Protestant and Catholic proselytism but have developed far beyond this to be at the core of discipleship and spiritual revival. These Sunday School movements have many similarities to Evangelical organizations like The Navigators, Agape, or YWAM, organizing conferences for spiritual teaching, organizing pilgrimages, fostering close relationships that allow formal and informal teaching, etc. The crucial difference, however, is that they remain under the authority of the Church which they seek to serve.

In 1918 a layman, Ḥabib Jirjis, founded the Coptic Sunday School Movement to encourage Orthodox youth to respond to Catholic and Protestant presentations of Christian faith, and later to resist the fundamentalism of the Muslim Brotherhood (Hassan 2003, pp. 71–84). In the 1930s Coptic students at Fouad, later Cairo, University began to train educated leaders as agents of reform, and by the 1940s the movement had broad impact with around 42,000 students involved nationally with a common curriculum. The movement trained important leaders, including the charismatic and influential Pope Shenouda III (1971–2012), who led vigorous responses to the Islamic Brotherhood and negotiated on behalf of the Coptic community, but also others with spiritual but less public influence such as Father Matthew the Poor whose writings have been influential in the movement (Hassan 2003, pp. 74–81; Musa 1991).

Indian Orthodox students were mobilized to nurture commitment to Orthodox spiritual life in the face of modern challenges, and to train influential academic leaders, leading to the foundation of the Syrian Students Conference in 1907, which in 1956 ultimately became the Mar Gregorios Orthodox Christian Student Movement (MGOCSM), aiming 'to bring together our students in various colleges and high schools with a view to deepening their spiritual life and to create in them a livelier sense of fellowship,' including arranging liturgical services for Indian students outside Kerala where there is no Orthodox parish. Currently there are about 40,000 members, and four of its former General Secretaries have been consecrated bishops of the Malankara Orthodox Church, including the current Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan Baselios Marthoma Paulose II, also known as Bishop Paulose Mar Miletios (Varghese 2010; The Malankara Orthodox Church 2015). There is scant published information about this group, but the author has had personal communication with Fr Abraham Thomas, from the Theology College in Kottayam regarding these details.

Much later, stalled by Ethiopia's Communist experiment from 1974–1991, the Ethiopian Orthodox Maḫbärä Qəddusan, 'Association of Saints', was founded on 9 May 1991. Facing overthrow by rebel forces in late 1990 and early 1991 the in February 1991 government obliged all students in higher education to join military training in the town of Blate, in southern Ethiopia. The Communist regime was overthrown before their training was complete but moving so many students to one location had a significant impact on student religious groups. Around 2000 Orthodox students from diverse campuses found great encouragement in meeting together, and these associations, each dedicated to a different saint, amalgamated into a single Maḫbärä Qəddusan, 'Association of Saints', subsequently formally organized under the Sunday School Department of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church (EOTC) (Kidusan 2017; Binns 2017, p. 242). The Maḫbärä Qəddusan has grown rapidly in size and influence and now dominates the spiritual activities of Orthodox Christian students on university campuses, with a significant research department, and a vision to mobilize the professional skills of its members to serve the

church. The early activities of this group were encouraged by Coptic and Indian clergy and laity, and interaction between the three Sunday School groups continues.

4.2. Connection with Monastic Life

Revival is associated with increased commitment to the monastic life, and a closer engagement of laity with the monastic communities. Revival in Egypt and Ethiopia has seen increased numbers of monastics (Schroeder 2017; Chaillot 2002, pp. 152–94; Binns 2017, pp. 227–52; Guirguis and Doorn-Harder 2011, pp. 127–54). The situation in India has been more challenging, as there were no monastic communities at the beginning of the 20th century, but a small, active community has grown, with only 160 monks and about 250 female monastics a decade ago, so currently their impact on the laity is limited (Varghese 2010, pp. 240–41).

Thriving monasticism may be taken as one indicator of revival but its impact on discipleship is seen through engagement between laity and monastics. Monastics have always mentored the devout laity, and the relationship between a believer and their spiritual father is crucial in the development of discipleship. The Maḫbärä Qəddusan, Association of Saints, organizes groups to visit monasteries for spiritual guidance with members reciprocating by offering their professional services to monasteries and the communities around them for no fee. Many monasteries have constructed simple guest accommodation to serve the increased number of visitors. This has resulted in the revival of some monastic communities and produces a strong dynamic interaction between laity and monks, and strong connections between urban and rural Orthodox communities (Binns 2017, p. 242). Similar dynamic relationships are found in Egypt, (Schroeder 2017; Hassan 2003, p. 81).

4.3. Participation in the Mysteries Expressing Discipleship

A full discussion of the understanding of sacraments or mysteries, their preferred title in Orthodox expressions, is beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, an appreciation of the unique ways in which sacraments are understood and practiced must be developed to understand their place in discipleship. Although Orthodox expressions affirm seven sacraments, baptism and the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper, are held to be sacraments in many Christian expressions and so provide a the most useful comparison across the expressions. In many Evangelical expressions, adult baptism is taken as an expression of devotion on the part of a believer, understood as taking adult responsibility for one's faith for someone raised in Christin faith, or as a clear expression of conversion and progress in discipleship by an adult, and the way in to taking the Lord's Supper (Gilbart-Smith 2012). Whilst baptism is understood as essential in Orthodox and sacramental Evangelical expressions, pedobaptism practiced in Orthodox and some Evangelical expressions means that its practice does not mark out the distinctive of the continued devotion of a disciple.

The regular celebration of the Eucharist is, however, a distinct marker of discipleship. Within Evangelical expressions, there is significant divergence in the significance attributed to this sacrament. In the Reformed tradition taking Lord's Supper regularly is understood as obedience to Christ, 'to symbolize the New Covenant, to point to the fellowship of a redeemed people gathered at his table, and to anticipate the messianic banquet yet to come' (Griffiths 2020), and so considered a core aspect of discipleship (McGrath 2016, pp. 383–404). In these expressions, Martin Luther's view is fundamental, where the Eucharist is taken as: affirming promises of grace and forgiveness; identifying those to whom the promises are made and proclaiming the death of the one who made those promises, affirming both individual corporate belonging (McGrath 2016, pp. 392, 394), and so is understood as a deeply significant part of Christian worship. There is, however, is a trend amongst some Evangelicals away from liturgical and sacramental worship (Barna Group 2018) with some regarding it more as ordinance rather than a sacrament, and especially in some newly established Evangelical churches it may not be a focus at all (Galli 2019).

In Orthodox expressions the Church is a place of transformation through encounter with God in the liturgy and the mysteries, regular participation in which lies at the heart of discipleship, especially the Eucharist, 'the sacrament of sacraments' (Steenberg 2008, pp. 121–22). For Orthodox Christians, choosing to participate in the Eucharist is a strong indicator of the inner spiritual life of a believer. In line with all Orthodox expressions, Pope Shenouda III, Patriarch of the Egyptian Orthodox Church from 1971–2012, explains with simple biblical references that taking the Eucharist is commanded, that the bread and wine are the flesh and blood of Christ, although understood as a mystery, and that communion 'grants eternal life, steadfastness in the Lord, and forgiveness of sins' (Shenouda 1999, pp. 132–53), affirming the Orthodox understanding of the salvific function of the Eucharist. With this connection to salvation, taking Holy Communion is an essential component of Christian discipleship, without which spiritual life and growth to maturity are not possible. It is understood as the 'participation in the divine nature' spoken of in 2Pet 1:4 and an essential part of the life of repentance, leading to a personal experience of Christ himself (Steenberg 2008, p. 127).

Such a high view of the Eucharist has led to an understanding that participating is only for the spiritually very pure with extended preparation required (Boylston 2018, pp. 5–12). The author has observed that until recently young adult Christians in Ethiopia have strong reservations about taking communion at all, fearing taking it in vain and suffering the most grievous consequences. Pope Shenouda III articulates the reasons behind this referring to 1Cor 11:27, where unworthy taking the bread and wine is deemed guilty of the body and blood of Christ. Consequently, serious self-examination is expected, again in line with 1Cor 11:28 (Shenouda 1999, pp. 132–53), a view reflected in the Ethiopian Church's Fetha Nagast, (Tzadua and Strauss 2002, p. xv): 'let a man examine himself first and make his soul good and saintly; then let him eat of that bread and drink from the chalice,' (Tzadua and Strauss 2002, p. 86). In the early 1990s, an observer in an Ethiopian Orthodox Church would have seen only very young and elderly people lining up to take communion. Those under the age of seven may take communion without significant preparation, and the elderly were understood as less prone to fall into error. Failure to participate in the Eucharist regularly, however, has been as sign of serious shortfalls in the spiritual life of the Orthodox Churches, and with an increased focus in Ethiopia on Christian discipleship since the 1990s, younger adults have been increasingly willing to take communion regularly. Articles in the popular Orthodox Christian magazine, Ḥamär, 'the Ship,' in Ethiopia explain the necessity of taking holy communion even though it requires preparation (Kidusan 1988), with similar encouragement from Abuna Mathias, the Ethiopian Patriarch (Nigus 2017). Likewise, a return to regular participation in the Eucharist is characterized by O'Mahony as a sign of revival in the Coptic Church (O'Mahony's 2006), with similar trends observed in India (Varghese 2010). Seen in this light participation in the Eucharist reflects regular practice of self-examination, and the discipline of repentance, leading to assurance that sins are forgiven.

The significance of the Eucharist in discipleship is emphasized further in Ethiopia with changes in the practice of Christian marriage. Civil or secular marriage has been widespread, but 'spiritual' marriage, a Church wedding which involves taking of communion, was until recently uncommon (Fritsch 2010). The author has observed, however, that confidence developed since the 1990s, has led to Church weddings becoming more common among the younger generation who have understood forgiveness, and are so prepared to take communion. Such marriage is indissoluble in Orthodox tradition, and so this trend is also a reflection of young people taking marriage very seriously, as a lifelong commitment, which may also be taken as reflecting Christian discipleship.

Fasting and almsgiving might also be included in the discussion of the discipline of repentance that leads believers to be prepared to take communion. Orthodox Christians fast, abstaining from dairy and meat products for half the year or sometimes more, and almsgiving is a strong commitment of many. In discipleship there are a strong affirmation of Mat. 4:4 that 'one does not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the

mouth of God' (Chryssavgis 2008, p. 161) Nevertheless, in all the expressions considered there may be strong social pressure on people to practice these disciplines, and so they are not a distinctive mark of discipleship.

4.4. Commemoration of the Glorious Past, Apostolic Identity, and Ancient Languages

Developing O'Mahony's reflections on Coptic renewal, an awareness of and passion for the ancient roots and Apostolic connections of Christianity in each nation is important in discipleship with a connected passion for the study of their tradition's ancient language. Evangelicals frequently do have a strong sense of history, but some have been accused of historical amnesia (Boekestein 2018) and it is probably not to be considered a central element of discipleship. In contrast the Orthodox understanding of the Church and its history lies at the heart of Christian devotion and discipleship.

Among the most revered of saints in these traditions are those who first brought Christianity, as outlined in the historical background earlier. The issue is primarily one of identity, and even though details of accounts of Christian origins may be questioned by scholars they affirm something very powerful at the heart of Christian daily life in these Orthodox communities. Coptic Christians connections with the flight of the Holy Family and St Mark's martyrdom are strong. The Ethiopians identify strongly with the baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch by Peter in Acts 8, and then appeal to their first bishops St Frumentius (d. c.383) and his ordination in 328 CE by St Athanasius. The Indian Orthodox derive strong identity from their connection to the Apostle Thomas, in a strong oral song tradition. Furthermore, each tradition has its own accounts of national saints who are honored, making a continuous connection with their roots. This is not simply an awareness of history, or asserting Apostolic connections, but it reflects the experience of the communion of the saints in Orthodox discipleship 'calling into the present experience of the human mind and heart—or nous—the reality of God's redeeming work' (Steenberg 2008, p. 128).

To access this heritage Orthodox disciples often develop a passion their traditions' ancient language. Theological colleges in Egypt, Ethiopia and India offer courses in Hebrew and Greek, but there is relatively little interest in text critical approaches. The primary interest is in languages in which Christianity was transmitted to and thrived within those cultures and the literature that connects them with their ancient heritage: Coptic for the Egyptians, Syriac for the Indians, and Gəʿəz for the Ethiopians. Knowledge of these ancient languages gives these communities a deep connection with the roots of their Christian expression and access to its literary heritage. Furthermore, in each tradition the rich liturgical tradition, the related poetic hymns and the musical traditions associated with them are all part of the unique spiritual expression of these cultures. Even without knowledge of the language, believers will often appreciate their musical and chanting traditions.

Lying behind the historical connection are deeper issues of theology and epistemology that are often overlooked. J B Segal said of the seminal Syriac Christian writer, Ephrem, 'his work . . . shows little profundity or originality of thought and his metaphors are labored. His poems are turgid, humourless, and repetitive' (Segal 1970, p. 79), a comment more on a western scholar's poor connection with a tradition than a realistic appraisal of Ephrem's contribution. These outlooks have been challenged more recently, for instance with the seminal work of Sidney Griffith has opened the world of Arabic speaking Christianity, for example in The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque (Griffith 2008). With some training, Christians from these expressions will find theology framed in ways that are particularly appropriate that are markedly different from post enlightenment western cultures.

Taking the example of Ethiopia, the chants emanating from churches throughout the night are sung in classical Gəʿəz, the text and melodies having evolved from the sixth century and the original hymns of St Yared, whose tradition is discussed briefly, for instance, in The Songs of Africa: The Ethiopian Canticles (Lee 2017a, pp. 11–20). From their childhood Ethiopians will have heard these chants, and as faith awakens there is a strong

desire to understand these beautiful songs. Gəʿəz is still used in the creative extempore poetical tradition of qəne that weaves sophisticated double meanings and symbols to make theological connections conveying meaning (Binns 2017, pp. 175–8; Kidane 2007). These poems are best appreciated in Gəʿəz and so knowledge of the language and literary tradition becomes a part of the spiritual journey of many disciples.

Language and reception are more complex issues for the Indian Orthodox, since their textual heritage was almost completely destroyed following the Synod of Diamper in 1599 (Gillman and Klimkeit 1999, p. 200), but their later connection with the Syrian Church helped them draw on the Syriac heritage that undoubtedly underlies their expression of Christianity, and it was for this purpose that the St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute was established (St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute 2018). A sound basis for understanding that Syriac Christian outlook has been established now by many scholars, most notably Sebastian Brock, masterfully summarized in The Luminous Eye (Brock 1992) a text enthusiastically studied by Indian scholars.

For the Egyptians this heritage is more complex, because early on Christianity grew in two connected ways, with Greek being the ancient lingua franca in the Hellenized city of Alexandria and perhaps in other centers, but with Coptic in the more rural areas. These were superseded eventually by Arabic in the centuries after the Arab invasions of the seventh century. Greek speaking Alexandrian Christian thought was very influential certainly up to the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE, but even by the third century there were Coptic translations of biblical books and a significant body of patristic material (Pearson 2006, pp. 333, 349). Following the seventh century Arab invasion of Egypt Coptic was gradually replaced by Arabic, and by the thirteenth century Alexandria had become the intellectual center of Arabic Christianity, although the liturgy continued to be celebrated in Coptic (Griffith 2008, p. 64). The challenges of Protestant and Catholic mission in the nineteenth century and educational reforms meant that Coptic developed from a language understood by a few clergy to one of significant intellectual interest under the reforms of Pope Kyrillos IV (1854–1861) (Miyokawa 2017, pp. 151–52). It was a revived laity with a passion for discipleship in their tradition that developed an awareness of the pharaonic heritage and perhaps a sense of Egyptian identity that was not rooted in Islam, but that could provide a point of unity between Muslim and Christian Egyptians (van Doorn-Harder 2017, pp. 9–13; Iskander 2012, pp. 63–64). Additionally, Iqladiyus Labib articulated the strength of Coptic identity affirming it as a language of science, research, honor and glory that would keep the Egyptians from being 'demons' without a homeland or religion (Miyokawa 2017, pp. 153–54). Later movements also promoted the language, including the radical Coptic Nation, which was formed in response to the increasingly aggressive Muslim Brotherhood (Hassan 2003, p. 60). Others associated with the Church of St. Anthony in Cairo emerged with strong spiritual influence in the 1940s, with leaders stating that, 'revitalization of the church depended on their digging for their spiritual roots, on looking backward and inward toward their own heritage,' and they unearthed ancient hymns and chants, and rediscovered the stories of Egypt's holy men and martyrs, even in library basements as far away as Oxford (Hassan 2003, pp. 76–77). The Sunday School Movement also stimulated broader secular interest with the establishment of The Coptic Institute in Cairo, aimed at the academic study of Coptic language and literature, church dogma and canon law, as well as art, archaeology and history (Hassan 2003, p. 88).

The Fathers of the Church taught the Orthodox Churches how to read and understand the scriptures, and though many devout Orthodox shy from independent reading and interpretation of the Scriptures, guided by Fathers accessed through the study of ancient language, spiritual revival and a life of discipleship is strongly associated with personal and corporate reading of the Scriptures, and early Christian texts—continuously appropriating past writings to enlighten the current age (Casiday 2008).

4.5. Upholding Martyrdom, Even in the Present Day

To lose one's life for the sake of belief in Christ remains one of the most honored acts in Orthodoxy and across diverse Christian expressions. In recent years, martyrdom has been a feature of the spiritual life of Christians in Egypt and Ethiopia, perhaps most memorably in Libya, where ISIS forces executed young Egyptians and Ethiopians recorded in infamous videos. Both churches have honored these dead as martyrs and saints. It perhaps shows the significance of martyrdom in these traditions most clearly that it seems likely that one of the Ethiopians was a Muslim who chose to die with his Christian compatriots—act of spiritual solidarity that means that he is honored along with those professing Christian faith (Kibriye 2019). Nevertheless, the Coptic Church has had persecution and martyrdom as one of its defining elements from its inception, through the great persecution of Diocletian which started in 284 CE. Subject to dhimmi status under Islamic rule following the Arab invasions in the seventh century and then under Ottoman rule and then facing the challenge of increasingly fundamentalist Islamic outlooks throughout the twentieth century, more recently hundreds of Copts have been martyred since the 'Arab Spring' of 2011 (Tawfik 2017). What marks this out as a feature of discipleship is the accounts that have shown individual willingness to die for their faith, and how communities have prayed for those who persecute them (Tawfik 2017).

5. Conclusions

Discipleship proves somewhat difficult to define precisely, but through observing changes associated with spiritual revival this study has identified strong trends in Orthodox Christian Egyptian, Ethiopian and Indian Orthodox Churches that evince approaches to discipleship that have allowed their communities to thrive in the modern world. With centuries of divergence between Evangelical and Oriental Orthodox communities we would expect strong differences in behavior that are understood to reflect inner transformation and motivation. The Sunday School movements reflect primarily a commitment to teaching and study that is shared across the traditions, with the primary difference being that perhaps with Evangelical churches such movements may exists outside any particular church jurisdiction. A more detailed examination of the teaching in Orthodox Sunday School movements compared with that found in Evangelical expressions would be revealing of any strong connection or divergence. Connection with the monastic life is probably unique to the Oriental traditions and other Orthodox expressions, although perhaps communities such as the L'Abri Fellowship and some others reflect a similar attraction to teaching communities within the broad Evangelical tradition. It would be a worthwhile study to examine what connections might exist between traditional monastic communities as centers of discipleship and such fellowships, or perhaps with the teaching and training of Evangelical organizations such as The Navigators, Agape, etc. Participation in the mysteries on the surface seems peculiar to the Orthodox, but what is reflected in, for instance, the deep understanding of the forgiveness of sins entailed in taking the Eucharist would also be reflected in Evangelical discipleship. Further research exploring the overlap between the convictions lying behind partaking of the mysteries and some Evangelical practice would be illuminating. 'Historical amnesia' may be a characteristic of some Evangelicals and perhaps the roots of Protestant Christianity in breaking with the past have contributed to this, and it would be valuable to explore how narratives of history have contributed to a sense of divergence between expressions, and how these narratives might be adjusted in Orthodox and Evangelical expressions to provide a greater sense of the worldwide movement of God in the Church. Martyrdom has sadly become a feature of the life of many Christians around the world, but again worthy of further investigation would be the underlying convictions that motivate Christians of all expressions to face death for their faith.

The overlap between Orthodox and similar Evangelical practice may be somewhat obscured from Western eyes as they are so strongly associated with the contextual development of Churches in diverse, non-western cultures where they have faced very different

challenges from those that have produced contemporary Evangelical movements, but this perhaps exposes the error of reading too much into the outward behavior rather than the underlying motivations. Exploring these underlying motivations may prove difficult and since ethnographies may not provide a wide enough range of data to draw broad conclusions, there is a significant need for methodological developments to further this research.

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Article

Together toward Christ: Comparing Orthodox and Wesleyan Positions on Evangelism

Kristina Whiteman [1,2]

[1] Asbury Theological Seminary, Orthodox Christian Mission Center, Wilmore, KY 40390, USA; k.whiteman@ocmc.org
[2] Mission Specialist in Care and Training States, St. Augustine, FL 32086, USA

Abstract: Inspired by the events of the 2018 consultation of the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative, this brief article seeks to pare down the broader question of "greater Christian unity" within the North American sphere to a more digestible, specific, practical question: How do Wesleyan and Orthodox positions on evangelism compare? This question is examined by describing the Wesleyan and Orthodox views of evangelism, delineating some key similarities and differences, and proposing a way forward for Wesleyans and Orthodox, together toward Christ.

Keywords: ecumenism; Wesleyan; Orthodox; evangelism; John Wesley; Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative

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1. Introduction

In the summer of 2018, approximately sixty Eastern and Oriental Orthodox and Evangelical protestants gathered at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology for a consultation of the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative.[1] As a convert with both deep gratitude for my Wesleyan Free Methodist upbringing and devotion to the spiritual home I have found in Eastern Orthodoxy, I was deeply blessed by the opportunity to participate with these men and women, clergy and laity, from around the world. The days were filled with fellowship, with good discussions, and with some honest talk about what makes us the same and what makes us distinct. I walked away feeling hopeful—connected to others who feel as I do that this type of ecumenism, which seeks to love the Christian Other in order to better love the world, is pleasing to God. Yet, I also walked away feeling uncertain—concerned that the very real differences between us are enough to keep us constantly apart in any but the most superficial ways. Most importantly, I walked away feeling more strongly affirmed in the importance of relationships and the desire to see these two Christian Traditions work together for the sake of the world.

It is necessary to pare down the extremely broad "search for Christian unity" to a more digestible, more specific, more practical issue. As an Eastern Orthodox Christian, my own Tradition is a natural home-base for discussion. Due to the wide variety of theology and praxis within Protestantism, it is impossible to compare this group of groups with Orthodoxy: Wesleyan Christians make up a large group at the center of Protestantism, which, along with their clear united historical antecedents, makes them a manageable comparison group. Brought by missionaries to the North American context quite close to each other in time, each tied to a historic tradition but also creating something new, Wesleyan Christianity and Orthodox Christianity[2] have been passed on and practiced in a unique way within this context.

At the heart of Christianity is witness; evangelism, then, is a proper place to begin efforts at greater unity through dialogue. This paper will examine the possibility of Wesleyan-Orthodox cooperation in the area of evangelism by: describing the Wesleyan and Orthodox views of evangelism, delineating some key similarities and differences, and proposing a way forward for Wesleyans and Orthodox.

2. Introductory Definitions

By way of preamble, some definitions are in order. First of all, "Wesleyan" may be defined as the Christian Tradition which hews closely to the teachings and example of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism who is also the basis for many other Protestant denominations' theology and praxis. This paper will focus on the theology of evangelism specifically espoused by John Wesley himself.

Secondly, for the purposes of this paper, "evangelism" will be defined as the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ (see, for example: Jackson 2012, pp. 46, 52, 57; Hynson 1982, p. 27; Ware and Neff 2011, p. 41; Nissiotis 1975, p. 86; Tosi 2014, p. 10; Rommen 2017, p. 187; Wesley 1738; Wesley 1785c). As will be seen in the further discussion, this proclamation may take varied forms, and it may be characterized as "witness," as "sharing God's good news," as "communicating the gospel,", etc. Ultimately, whatever words are used to describe it, all evangelism is an effort to tell the one story of the salvific Incarnation, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

3. John Wesley and Evangelism

Although John Wesley himself did not use the word "evangelism" (Jackson 2012, p. 50), certainly sharing the gospel message was a central theme of both his writing and his personal ministry. Wesley understood evangelism as a process: first of all, those who have received the gospel message share that message, either with those who have never heard or with those who call themselves Christians but lack the true "religion of love" (Wesley 1796, p. 21; see also Outler 1971, p. 23; Wesley 1796; Wesley 1786). Over time, those who hear are first "awakened" to their life of sin and need for God (Jackson 2012, p. 51; Wesley 1760, 1765; Wesley 1738). This awakening leads to repentance, repentance leads to faith (Hynson 1982, p. 30; Jackson 2012, pp. 52–53; Wesley 1760, 1765), and faith leads to justification, or conversion.

The fruits of evangelism do not stop with personal conversion, however: faith grows with a commitment to Christ and leads to love (Hynson 1982, p. 34; Wainwright 2002; Wesley 1765, 1789; Knight and Powe 2006; Wesley 1760). This love, first of God but also of others (Hynson 1982, p. 32; Jackson 2012, pp. 53–54; Wesley 1765, 1789; Wainwright 2002; Wesley 1733, 1782, 1786, 1796), is not a mere emotion—it is more than an internal feeling. It is "faith active in love" (Hynson 1982, p. 31) through holy living, service to others, and verbal proclamation which is a confirmation of the gospel which has been received (Hynson 1982, p. 27; Jackson 2012, p. 51; Wesley 1760, 1765, 1785a, 1786). This becomes a self-perpetuating cycle, as those who take hold of the gospel cannot help but pass it on to others (Wesley 1733).

4. Orthodoxy and Evangelism

The words "evangelism," "mission," "witness," and "preach the gospel" are frequently used interchangeably by Eastern Orthodox Christians; in the American Orthodox Church[3] in particular, evangelism is frequently tied to the Great Commission (See, for example, Schmemann 1959; additionally, each of the three largest American Orthodox jurisdictions (Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, The Orthodox Church in America, and the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America) mention the Great Commission in their material on Outreach/Evangelism/Mission). An Orthodox understanding of evangelism would include preaching Christ to those who are nominally or culturally Christian, in addition to those who are completely outside the Faith (Nissiotis 1975, pp. 86, 90; Stamoolis 1986, pp. 56, 98; Yannoulatos 2010, p. 19).

For Orthodox, evangelism includes holiness of life and an authentic personal witness of empathetic, vulnerable love (Hierarchs of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas 2000, pp. 58, 64, 70; Nissiotis 1975, pp. 80, 91; Lemopoulos 1998, p. 324; Tosi 2014, p. 21; Bria 1996, p. 48; Whiteman 2019). Worship is an integral part of evangelism (Lemopoulos 1998, p. 324; Bria 1975, p. 248; Tosi 2014, p. 4; Whiteman 2019; Stamoolis 1986, p. 10, 86–94), but spreading the good news is also often

seen as involving more than verbal proclamation. Because evangelism is primarily "letting our light shine," it can include activities such as care for the poor (Nissiotis 1975, pp. 79, 88; Hierarchs of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas 2000, p. 64; Bria 1984, p. 67; Whiteman 2019; Yannoulatos 2010, p. 96).

The goal of evangelism is conversion to relationship with the Trinity through Christ (Nissiotis 1975, p. 87; Nassif 2004, p. 67; Lemopoulos 1998, p. 324; Tosi 2014, p. 4; Damick 2013, p. 16; Yannoulatos 2010, p. 148; Stamoolis 1986, p. 101); the "transmission of the life of communion which exists in God" (Nissiotis 1975, p. 78). Repentance, faith, and baptism go together (Nassif 2004, p. 79); it is in the Eastern Orthodox Church, which is itself the Eucharistic Community, that those who have been evangelized find this union with the Trinity in theosis and thus enter into the "'recapitulation of all things' (Eph 1: 1) in Christ and our participation in the divine glory, the eternal, final glory of God" (Yannoulatos 2010, p. 46).

5. Key Similarities

Wesleyan and Orthodox understandings of evangelism are certainly not identical, but they do have key similarities. For example, both Wesleyans and Orthodox Christians see evangelism as absolutely necessary rather than optional (Jackson 2012, p. 51; Hynson 1982, p. 40; Nissiotis 1975, p. 87; Hierarchs of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas 2000, p. 57; Nassif 2004, p. 83; Rommen 2017, p. 177; Chrysostom 1997; Abraham 1989, p. 165). It is the task of the whole community of God to tell others about what God has done in the world in Jesus Christ (Nissiotis 1975, p. 90; Bria 1984, p. 67; Bria 1975, p. 245; Schmemann 1959; Halvorsen 2007, p. 280). Additional agreements can be found in three major areas: the role of the Trinitarian God, the role of human beings, and process-oriented transformation.

6. Evangelism: The Trinitarian God at Work

The Trinitarian God is always the primary actor in both perspectives on evangelism (Lemopoulos 1998, p. 322; Wesley 1775, 1780; Wainwright 2002; Wesley 1796, p. 6; Vassiliadis 2002, p. 105; Wesley 1790, 1785c; Yannoulatos 2010, p. 7). God the Father, through the Incarnation of the Son, in the Holy Spirit, is active at every step. An immanent God reaches out to human beings with salvation which is a free gift, open to all people (Tyson 2000, pp. 60, 61; Hierarchs of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas 2000, pp. 61, 95; Rommen 2017, p. 194; Wesley 1736, 1738, 1750, 1782, 1790, 1796; Nassif 2004, p. 47; Hynson 1982, p. 28; Lemopoulos 1998, p. 324).

Both traditions believe that God has been at work in advance of evangelism, preparing the way in the midst of cultural and personal contexts (Tyson 2000, p. 67; Hierarchs of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas 2000, p. 95; Nissiotis 1975, p. 77; Wesley 1765, 1780, 1788, 1796; Outler 1971, pp. 44–45). What Wesleyans would refer to as "prevenient grace" (Whiteman and Anderson 2009), Orthodox Christians might refer to as "spermatic Logos" (Hierarchs of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas 2000, p. 96; Justin and Falls 1965). Both convey the idea that God has provided for all people a path toward the path of salvation, even long before human beings hear the name of Christ. In fact, the ability to respond to evangelism—faith itself—is a divine gift given by God through the Holy Spirit (Nassif 2004, p. 74; Hynson 1982, p. 29; Wesley 1760, 1790, 1796; Tyson 2000, p. 52; Jackson 2012, p. 56; Grdzelidze 2007, p. 175).

Although Orthodox Christians perhaps emphasize the generally Trinitarian nature of evangelism more strongly than Wesleyans do (Nissiotis 1975, p. 77; Nassif 2004, p. 81), this may be a function of Orthodoxy's tendency to refer *everything* back to the Trinity (see, for instance, Yannoulatos 2010, p. 8) rather than an actual difference in theological opinion, as there is so much shared understanding as to the role of the persons of the Trinity. Both Wesleyan and Orthodox understandings of evangelism are highly focused on Christ's redemptive work (Tyson 2000, pp. 63, 66; Nissiotis 1975, pp. 75, 78; Lemopoulos 1998,

pp. 324–25; Damick 2013, p. 16; Wesley 1736, 1780). The primary story being witnessed to is that of **Jesus**—he is the lynchpin, the one on whom all history turns. Both Traditions see the Incarnation, death, and Resurrection as central—this is the message evangelism seeks to communicate.

In another example of shared understandings, both have very similar views of the role of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit energizes Christians for evangelism, sanctifying them and empowering them to live holy lives and to express the gospel (Tyson 2000, pp. 52, 62, 65; Jackson 2012, pp. 46, 53; Hynson 1982, pp. 33, 35, 36; Nissiotis 1975, pp. 88, 92; Rommen 2017, p. 183; Wesley 1733, 1736, 1785c). The Holy Spirit awakens non-Christians to their sins, providing the conviction that "presses" them toward repentance (Jackson 2012, p. 55; Hynson 1982, p. 35; Nissiotis 1975, p. 77; Nassif 2004, p. 74; Lemopoulos 1998, p. 328; Rommen 2017, p. 199; Outler 1971, p. 46; Grdzelidze 2007, p. 175; Wesley 1760). Additionally, it is the Holy Spirit who is at work in and after conversion, sanctifying and transforming Christians (Nassif 2004, p. 71; Hynson 1982, p. 35; Jackson 2012, p. 53; Lemopoulos 1998, p. 322; Bria 1975, p. 250; Knight and Powe 2006; Charlesworth 2007, p. 68; Wesley 1733, 1736, 1760).

7. Evangelism: Human Response to the Invitation of the Trinity

In addition to shared understandings of the work of the Trinity, Wesleyan and Orthodox views hold similar understandings of the role people play in evangelism. First of all, humans retain their agency in reception of the gospel—God reaches out first, but people must respond of their own free will (Tyson 2000, p. 61; Jackson 2012, p. 48; Bria 1984, p. 70; Knight and Powe 2006; Grdzelidze 2007, p. 175; Wesley 1790). Even though it is entirely possible that people will ignore or respond in the negative, rejecting the message of evangelism (Nissiotis 1975, p. 76; Hierarchs of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas 2000, p. 54), it is absolutely vital that no coercion or manipulation be utilized—a free response to evangelism is the only valid response (Jackson 2012, pp. 48, 56; Hynson 1982, pp. 28, 38–40; Nassif 2004, p. 74). Secondly, humans retain their agency in expression of the gospel—although the natural outflow of the Holy Spirit's work in the Christian **is** love of God and neighbor, obedience is always invited, never forced (Tyson 2000, p. 52; Wesley 1789; Grdzelidze 2007, p. 175). Instead, God calls his people, offering them the opportunity to be a part of what He is doing in the world by sharing what has happened in their own hearts through evangelism (Hierarchs of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas 2000, pp. 61–65; Lemopoulos 1998, p. 328; Rommen 2017, p. 177; Wesley 1786, 1796; Halvorsen 2007, p. 278).

According to both traditions, God has entrusted people with this special task in evangelism—he chooses to work "through human agents" (Jackson 2012, p. 55). Indeed, God's design is that "person-to-person contact" is the way his Good News moves throughout the world (Hierarchs of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas 2000, p. 59; see also Yannoulatos 2010, p. 27). It is the personal witness of Christian people which allows Jesus Christ to be made known (Hierarchs of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas 2000, pp. 58, 64, 65; Nissiotis 1975, pp. 80, 91; Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese Department of Missions and Evangelism 2000; Jackson 2012, p. 51; Lemopoulos 1998, p. 328; Rommen 2017, p. 182; Wesley 1733, 1796).

Finally, both Orthodox Christians and Wesleyans agree that evangelism should be done in a way that is respectfully receiver-oriented; in other words, that the gospel should be communicated in ways that are aimed toward understanding and applicability on the part of those who are **hearing** (Rack 2002, p. 415). For Wesley, this meant expressing "plain truth for plain people" (Hynson 1982, p. 27; see also Hynson 1982, pp. 28, 30, 37–38, 40; Rack 2002, p. 344) with the goal of genuine, dialogical exchange that allowed the other person to make an informed choice (Hynson 1982, p. 30; see Wesley 1786). Orthodox Christians focus less on the decision-making process, but do think that evangelism should give genuine answers to the questions that people are actually asking (Hierarchs of the

Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas 2000, p. 91; Bria 1984, p. 71). This receiver-orientation of evangelism is also seen in the Orthodox discussion of cross-cultural evangelism: the expression of the gospel in the language and culture of the people, sometimes referred to as "indigenization" of the gospel, is paramount (Nissiotis 1975, pp. 80, 87, 89; Hierarchs of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas 2000, pp. 90, 93; Lemopoulos 1998, pp. 323, 329; Veronis 1994, p. 123).

8. Evangelism Leads to Process-Oriented Transformation

The third major category in which Orthodox Christians and Wesleyans share common understanding is this: there is an expectation that evangelism leads to process-oriented transformation (Tyson 2000, pp. 59–60, 62; Jackson 2012, pp. 50, 54; Hynson 1982, p. 27; Nassif 2004, p. 48; Lemopoulos 1998, p. 323; Fairbairn 2002, p. 8; Wesley 1765; Knight and Powe 2006; Rack 2002, p. 395; Halvorsen 2007, p. 284; Wesley 1733, 1760, 1784, 1785c, 1794). The goal is a new life (Nissiotis 1975, p. 87), that the Christian would become a "new creation" in Christ (Nissiotis 1975, p. 78; Hynson 1982, p. 33). Although conversion is a moment of inflection, it results in a progressive movement in the life of a Christian toward greater holiness—Christians grow more and more Christ-like.

Love of God inspires love of neighbor—this is the joint evidence, process, and result of this transformation (Hopko 1976, pp. 96, 104; Tyson 2000, pp. 52, 66; Hynson 1982, p. 32; Nissiotis 1975, pp. 79, 88; Lemopoulos 1998, p. 326; Chrysostom; Wesley 1733, 1760, 1784, 1796). Out of this love, Christians witness both through but also beyond words, as the way they live their actual lives is revolutionized ((Jackson 2012, p. 51; Hynson 1982, p. 33; Hierarchs of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas 2000, p. 64; Wesley 1765; Nissiotis 1975, pp. 79, 83, 85, 86, 88; Lemopoulos 1998, p. 324, 326; Abraham 1989, p. 106). This change, the result of evangelism, goes beyond the individual as well—societal structures and cultural contexts are transfigured as Christians actively live out Christ's love in the world (Tyson 2000, pp. 62, 65–66; Hynson 1982, pp. 28, 31, 33–34; Nissiotis 1975, pp. 79, 87, 89–90; Hierarchs of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas 2000, pp. 98, 100; Bria 1984, p. 68; Lemopoulos 1998, pp. 323, 327, 329; Outler 1971, pp. 25–33; Rack 2002, p. 365, 447).

A key part of this transformation process is being welcomed into a discipling community (Knight and Powe 2006; Wesley 1796; Outler 1971, p. 26). No person can be transformed alone (Wesley 1782; Hierarchs of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas 2000, p. 102; Tosi 2014, p. 14; Plekon 2007, p. 61; Vassiliadis 2002, p. 101). We need others to encourage, guide, admonish, and invite us deeper into the Christian life (Abraham 1989, p. 54; Knight and Powe 2006). Indeed, it is only as a member of a group that an individual can truly imitate the life-giving love of the Trinity (Vassiliadis 2002, p. 104; Damick 2013, pp. 3, 17).

9. Key Differences

Although Wesleyans and Orthodox Christians believe many of the same things about evangelism, it would be a mistake to imply that they are wholly compatible on this topic. On the part of many ecumenically minded authors—myself included—there can be a tendency to overlook or bypass these out of a desire for deeper unity. However, there are very real distinctions between the two, and it would be dishonest to say otherwise (Rommen 2004, p. 249; Jillions 2007, p. 55; see Nikolaev 2007, p. 95). These differences can generally be categorized as: differences in emphasis, intermediate differences, and one key divisive difference.

10. Differences in Emphasis

First of all, even within the areas of similarity, there are differences in emphasis. For example, the Orthodox insist upon the inclusion of the entire Trinity in discussions of evangelism, while Wesleyans focus primarily on Christ and the Holy Spirit (see, for

example, Wesley 1736). Because Orthodox literature referring to the specific role of the Father is scarce, and because the Wesleyan inclusion of the Father seems to me implicit (see, for example, Wesley 1780, 1785a, 1789), this variation seems more a matter of semantics than sense.

Similarly, the Wesleyan spotlight on "justification by faith" referred to by Hynson multiple times seems to be a difference in intensity rather than variety (1982, pp. 27, 28, 29, 39; Wesley 1765; see also Tyson 2000, p. 56; Outler 1971, p. 38; Wesley 1790, 1794). Orthodox Christians share a high regard for the role of faith, seeing it both as given by God and essential for the believer. They would also agree that salvation is a gift from God rather than payment for good works (Wesley 1796, p. 6, 11; Nassif 2004, p. 74; Outler 1971, pp. 44–45; Rack 2002, p. 392). At the same time, Orthodox Christians tend to shy away from this very Protestant way of expressing things. So, the two are in agreement in substance but with differing accentuation.

11. Intermediate Differences

In addition to these differences in emphasis, there are differences in approach to evangelism that can be thought of as "intermediate." This label is used because these are more substantial than the previously mentioned divergences but do not, necessarily, bring Wesleyans and Orthodox Christians to a point of conflict. They need to be addressed in more depth than alternative emphases. Although there may be additional differences that fall into this category, the two clearest from the literature examined are Orthodoxy's eschatological focus and Wesley's understanding of sanctification.

Orthodox Christians' understanding of evangelism is highly eschatological, pointed toward the end of all things, in which the entire cosmos is transformed (Nissiotis 1975, pp. 78, 80; Bria 1975, pp. 249–50; Behr 2007, p. 195; Hierarchs of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas 2000, p. 98; Nassif 2004, p. 55; Rommen 2017, p. 206; Yannoulatos 2010, p. 102). This is the primary goal of evangelism. While Wesleyans certainly see evangelism as affecting more than just individual souls[4], the restoration of the soul to the original Image of God is the primary action of conversion (Hynson 1982, p. 31; Abraham 1989, pp. 57, 59; Wesley 1736, 1741, 1765, 1784, 1785c, 1794). That which happens after, the change in life that leads to changes in society, is primarily a *result*.

The Orthodox view of evangelism, on the other hand, approaches redemption from a different angle;[5] it is focused on the holistic renewal of all created matter (Nissiotis 1975, p. 79; Halvorsen 2007, pp. 274, 277; Yannoulatos 2010, p. 46). The salvation of the individual is part and parcel of the larger picture of the now-but-not-yet Kingdom (Nissiotis 1975, p. 78; Behr 2007, p. 191; Vassiliadis 2002, p. 102; Whiteman 2019; Yannoulatos 2010, p. 48, 49). An evangelism-toward-the Kingdom approach makes Orthodox Christians willing to consider a much wider variety of activities as directly evangelistic. Wesleyans, on the other hand, are more likely to see activities such as feeding the hungry as expressing the love of Christ but not necessarily *evangelism*. The eschatological-Kingdom-focus of Orthodoxy does not necessarily go against the salvation-of-souls-focus of Wesley. Additionally, the argument can be made that Wesley's idea of "social holiness" which included both Christian community and the transformation of societies, is an effort toward building the Kingdom of God. However, the Orthodox eschatology is undeniably a distinctive.

In a second intermediate difference, the Wesleyan view of sanctification, of becoming more holy and of living a life of love of God and others, though greatly influenced by Orthodox writings (Heitzenrater 2002; Wainwright 2002; Wesley 1775, 1785a; Abraham 1989, p. 9; Vassiliadis 2002, p. 101; Young 2002, pp. 157, 164, 167–68), does not line up perfectly with the Orthodox idea of *theosis* (Nassif 2004, p. 42; Grdzelidze 2007, p. 173; Yannoulatos 2010, p. 47; Stamoolis 1986, p. 9). This goes back to an understanding of what happens in this process: Wesley does see sanctification as the "restored participation of fallen humanity in the Divine life and power," but this is understood to mean that the image of God in each person is being restored

through the work of the Holy Spirit in the human heart (Tyson 2000, p. 53). The Orthodox understanding of sanctification would go beyond this, to say that this restoration happens through *communion* with God, through participation in the energies of the life of the Trinity (Nissiotis 1975, p. 78; Shuttleworth 2005; Damick 2013, p. 8; Yannoulatos 2010, p. 46). The Wesleyan understanding of the end goal of evangelism is missing this special relationship which is a "distinctive characteristic" of Orthodox Christian thinking (Hierarchs of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas 2000, p. 68; Wesley 1741; See Tyson 2000, pp. 53–54). Here, there is more possibility of conflict, as Wesleyans who are perfectly comfortable with Wesley's understanding of sanctification may be uncomfortable with the idea of actual union with God, which is vital to Orthodox understanding of *theosis* (Hierarchs of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas 2000, p. 15; Shuttleworth 2005).

12. Difference That Divides

There is one primary difference between Orthodox and Wesleyan positions on evangelism that is a major stumbling block to cooperative efforts in this direction: the Eastern Orthodox Church is at the center of evangelism for Eastern Orthodox Christians (Lemopoulos 1998, p. 325; Bria 1975; Yannoulatos 2010, pp. 220–21, 81; Bria 1996, p. 9; Tosi 2014, pp. 7–8; Schmemann 1973, pp. 213–14; Veronis 1982, p. 51; Rommen 2017, p. 209; Jillions 2007, p. 44). Different Orthodox theologians will give different answers to the question, "Are Christians outside the Orthodox Church really Christians?" (See Nikolaev 2007). Nevertheless, it is undeniable that for Orthodox Christians, there is something special about the Eastern Orthodox Church (Stamoolis 1986, pp. 16–17, 98–99). This is because it is in the Church that conversion is made complete through participation in the Sacraments of Baptism and (particularly) Eucharist (Schmemann 1973, p. 215; Tosi 2014, pp. 4, 17; Yannoulatos 2010, p. 113; Cyprian of Carthage 2006, pp. 160, 162, 164; Nikolaev 2007, p. 92; Behr 2007, p. 188; Vassiliadis 2002, p. 107).

Orthodox Christians believe that the Church is the first-fruits and image of the Kingdom (Nissiotis 1975, pp. 77, 84; Vassiliadis 1998, pp. 14, 52); as the Eucharistic Community it is the "taste" of the Trinity that is promised in full at the *parousia* (Nissiotis 1975, p. 79; See Plekon 2007, p. 59; Vassiliadis 2002, p. 105). This is because through the Sacraments the Church is "*an event of communion which reflects in history the Trinitarian existence of God Himself*" (Nissiotis 1975, p. 79; See also Behr 2007, p. 196; Vassiliadis 2002, p. 104). God is genuinely present in the Eucharist, allowing human beings to partake of the divine, and **the Eucharist only happens in the Church** (See Schmemann 1988 for a fuller explanation of Orthodox understanding of what happens in the Eucharist; See also Damick 2013).

Additionally, for the Orthodox, the Church is the tie of the Universal connecting Christians throughout time and space. In the Church, that which has been believed as "Christianity" by all people in all places at all times is re-articulated for new people, places, and times (Rommen 2017, pp. 218–19). The Church tells the stories of two thousand years of martyrs, monastics, and missionaries (See Veronis 1994; Nikolaev 2007, p. 88). It is the carrier of memory, the link between the past, present, and future (Hierarchs of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas 2000, p. 128; See also Nikolaev 2007, p. 94; Halvorsen 2007, p. 274).

As was mentioned previously, Wesleyans and Orthodox Christians would agree that "there is no such thing as a solitary Christian" (Wesley 1782; Hierarchs of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas 2000, p. 102; Tosi 2014, p. 14), that Christianity cannot be lived outside of community (Abraham 1989, p. 54). They would also agree that Christianity is about relationship with God and with others (Hierarchs of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas 2000, p. 113; Hynson 1982, p. 32; Tosi 2014, p. 17). They even agree that there is a historical significance to the Church as Body of Christ (Wesley 1796, pp. 34–41; Outler 1971, p. 55; Rack 2002, p. 291).

For Orthodox Christians, the **Orthodox Church** is the location of that community, of those relationships, of that significance. It seems safe to conclude from his laud of the Western Church and denunciation of several branches of the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches as "little, if at all, better than the generality of the Heathens" (Wesley 1783), that Wesley would not agree. Additionally, one must look at Wesley's larger understanding of this topic: Wesley certainly had a category for "the Church" broadly as a mystical body, perhaps even as a Universal (Wesley 1785b). However, that which he spoke of in this sense seems rather more mystical than ecclesial. Indeed, given Wesley's eventual conclusion that the most important thing was to "spread vital religion" (Rack 2002, p. 300)—within or beyond the bounds of the Church of England—one could make the argument for a Wesleyan approach that is entirely disconnected from the boundaries of any formal religious institution (Rack 2002, pp. 306, 311; Charlesworth 2007, p. 66; See Wesley 1785b).

Clearly, this is a significant difference between Orthodox and Wesleyans that makes for not one road toward Christ, but two—parallel, similar in many ways, but still two—separate paths.

13. A Way Forward

So, if we are moving down two parallel paths, what are the prospects for Orthodox and Wesleyans working together in evangelistic endeavor? How can we travel these separate tracks together? Two clear areas of joint venture are: dialogue toward renewed self-understanding and service together in the name of Christ.

14. Dialogue toward Renewed Self-Understanding

Although many Orthodox are quick to proclaim Orthodoxy as the "one, true Church," they should be the first to admit that there is often a gap between Orthodox tradition/theology and Orthodox practice (Nassif 2004, p. 85). It is true that there are rays of hope, particularly in America. The Antiochian Archdiocese, for one, has long held evangelism in and for America not just as a value but as a way of life. In 2016, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese's *PRAXIS* magazine dedicated its Fall/Winter issue to the topic "Speaking to Secular America." Additionally, there are many examples at the parish and individual level of a commitment to evangelism in theory and practice.

At the same time, American Orthodoxy has an overall tendency to turn inward, to count as "evangelism" simply doing Orthodox services and living individual holy lives (Krindatch 2017, pp. 20, 148; See also Tosi 2014). These are certainly **essential**, but they are **not sufficient**. It is not just important but necessary to also turn outward—to actively desire the salvation of the whole world and to intentionally seek ways to join God in God's mission in the world and thus to reclaim their core identity as sharers of the gospel.

How does this connect to the earlier conversation detailing differences and similarities in the Orthodox and Wesleyan understandings of evangelism? A significant part of the way forward for both Wesleyans and Orthodox is dialogue with each other. The goal of this mutually enriching discussion is less that the two should teach each other lessons, and more that they might offer each other reminders—that Orthodox and Wesleyans would invite each other to self-reflection that reveals who they genuinely are (See Bria 1984).

Wesleyans can remind Orthodox that their engagement with the world should include their heads, their hands, and their hearts. Wesley and those who follow him most closely evidence a passion for the gospel that goes beyond cold rationality or systematic theology. At their best, Wesleyans show a level of enthusiastic joy that is contagious—if Orthodox Christians delighted in Christ's Resurrection every day in the way that they do on Pascha, what a witness to the world that would be! While some may agree with Metropolitan Kallistos that Orthodoxy is "simple Christianity" (Ware and Neff 2011, p. 39), it is undeniable that the layers of symbolism and Eastern-worldview which inform Orthodoxy can make it seem esoteric and other-worldly in a way that is not always accessible—Wesleyans can also remind Orthodox Christians of the need for practicality and simplicity in evangelism. Orthodox Christians tend to think of things with a long view, one which may cause them

to forget the immediate. Wesleyans can remind them of the urgency of the evangelistic task—that the building of the Kingdom, the salvation of all people and the whole cosmos is for *now*.

Orthodoxy has some reminders that would benefit their Wesleyan counterparts who desire to spread the gospel as well. Wesleyans, like many Protestants, may be tempted to think of Christian history as starting with the Reformation, or even with Wesley. This, however, is inconsistent with Wesley himself, who leaned heavily on Christian Patristics and the Book of Common Prayer (Hynson 1982, p. 35), considering himself to be part of a greater Christian continuum. Orthodox can remind Wesleyans of the depth of their Christian roots, of the long history that connects all Christians to Christ. In postmodern America, Wesleyans tend to be isolated and fragmented, frequently leaving behind the idea of formal "bands" or "classes." Orthodox can remind them of the grace of connection and community, of the necessity of Christ-centered, deep, and committed relationships with other Christians.

Wesleyan and Orthodox dialogue in this sense offers a unique opportunity for those who are willing to engage in respectful discussion which neither demands that the other change nor gives up their own true distinctives. Such exchange can be transformative, challenging both Orthodox Christians and Wesleyans to a deeper knowledge of their own Faith Tradition while also inviting each to a unity of their belief and praxis. Both Orthodox Christians and Wesleyans can remind each other of the need for theology which is deeply meaningful and intellectually satisfying precisely *because* it is applicable to everyday life. Through honest discussion together, Orthodox Christians and Wesleyans can be a part of a lived-theology of humility, repentance, joy, and authentic love.

15. Joint Service in the Name of Christ

The second area through which Wesleyans and Orthodox Christians could travel together is joint service in the name of Christ. There are many areas of practical ministry in which the motivation for the "right action" of helping people who are materially poor does not matter. The person receiving shelter, food, a listening ear, or training in job skills can receive Christ's love, likely without caring much about whether that assistance was spurred by Wesley's instruction to visit the sick or Basil's admonishment to share resources.

Once, when he was asked if it was appropriate for Orthodox to support a local ministry, Archbishop Job of Blessed Memory replied: "There ain't nothin' wrong with Methodist soup." Behind this statement is knowledge that the world is full of suffering—so full of pain and need and want that no one group can respond to it all. Orthodox and Methodists should consider pooling their resources, bringing together their "time, talent, and treasure" to help effect greater change than they could on their own.

In Archbishop Job's statement is also the acknowledgement of the good in the other. Both traditions see Christ in the person who is materially poor. That shared perspective should allow Orthodox and Wesleyans to also see Christ in each other. There is potential, then, for Orthodox and Wesleyans to acknowledge their own differences but also to acknowledge the world's suffering and to choose partnership toward its alleviation (See Bria 1984, p. 67). This would be a profound witness to the world that the gospel is truly good news.

FOCUS North America is a wonderful example of this kind of joint service. "FOCUS" stands for both "Fellowship of Orthodox Christians United to Serve" and for "Food, Occupation, Clothing, Understanding, and Shelter." Through its nine Centers and national and state programs, FOCUS serves those living in poverty in the name of Christ. Although "Orthodox" is in the name, FOCUS is an organization that in its practicalities brings together not only Orthodox of different jurisdictions but non-Orthodox Christians and faith-based groups.[6] In doing so, it exemplifies the willingness to cooperate in whatever ways are possible for the sake of others, out of love for Christ.

16. Conclusions

When it comes to evangelism, Eastern Orthodox and Wesleyan Christians share many positions. Both believe that Christians are called to evangelize, that through evangelism the Trinity is at work, that humanity has a responsibility and freedom in both offering and receiving evangelism, and that the result of evangelism is a transformation-in-process. There are, however, areas of difference as well; some are minor differences in emphasis, others are more significant, and at least one is a church-dividing issue. This difference does not mean, however, that Orthodox and Wesleyans cannot work together: through service to others and through dialogue which reminds them of their own core convictions, cooperative work is possible.

For the first time, the number of adults in the United States who report belonging to a church, synagogue, or mosque has fallen below 50%; all major subgroups are in decline, and nearly a third of respondents report "no religious affiliation" (Jones 2021). "Theological deconstruction" is a trending topic in Evangelical (and Exvangelical) circles (Vanderpool 2021). It is not uncommon to hear evangelism treated like a dirty word, a source of pain and not joy. What is the solution, for Orthodox and Wesleyans who believe that they are called to evangelism even in this climate?

εὐαγγέλιον, the root word for "evangelism", is the combination of the words for "good" and "messenger". In this moment, when it seems that the world is full of people who have not experienced Christians as those who bring "glad tidings of great joy," an opportunity arises: Orthodox and Wesleyans can take this moment to truly and deeply listen to each other and to find their own voices as "good messengers" in the process. They can serve others in the name of Christ, proclaiming His love for each other and for all persons with unity-in-action. They can walk down parallel paths, together toward Christ.

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Notes

1 For more information about LOI 2018, see http://www.loimission.net/loi-2018-fulfilling-our-commitment/ (accessed on 1 July 2021).

2 For the remainder of this article, all references to "Orthodox" or "Orthodoxy" refer to the Eastern Orthodox Church, rather than the Oriental Orthodox Church, which is a separate Tradition.

3 For the purposes of this paper, "American Orthodox" or "American Orthodoxy" refers more generally to those Americans who are members of one of the canonical Eastern Orthodox Jurisdictions operating in the United States of America. This is to differentiate from the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), which is a particular Jurisdiction.

4 See earlier discussion of Wesleyan view that social structures would be changed by sanctification.

5 *The Orthodox Faith* books by Fr. Thomas Hopko do an excellent job of explaining this difference in approach, in a way that is simply not possible here.

6 See, for example, St. Herman House, FOCUS Cleveland https://sainthermans.org (accessed on 1 July 2021).

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Article

Spiritual Synchronicity: Icon Veneration in Evangelical and Orthodox Religious Practices in the 21st Century

Mae Elise Cannon and Kevin Vollrath *

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP), Washington, DC 20002, USA; mae@cmep.org
* Correspondence: kevin@cmep.org

Abstract: Much scholarship in the dialogue between evangelical and Orthodox believers focuses on doctrinal compatibility. This article contributes to that literature by giving an example of a spiritual practice (icon veneration) that creates additional space for ecumenical dialogue and unity. Some US-evangelicals in the 21st century have incorporated the use of icons into their personal faith practices. Icon veneration is ripe with ecumenical potential for evangelical–Orthodox relations because of its prominence in Orthodox communions while at the same time appealing to a growing number of evangelicals. This article considers three sites of evangelical icon use in turn: the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia (EBCG), Icons of Black Saints, and an evangelical ministry called "Heart of the Artist". Each site adopts a slightly unique understanding of icons that may appeal to evangelical believers. Although Orthodox and evangelical believers may understand theologies of icon veneration differently, the emergence of icon veneration among evangelicals remains a spiritual synchronicity, and ought to be recognized as such. Evangelicals continue to receive the gift of icon veneration from their Orthodox siblings in ways in line with the EBCG, Black Orthodox icons, and Heart of the Artist, so icon veneration has potential to further resource ecumenical dialogue.

Keywords: iconography; icon veneration; evangelical–Orthodox relations; ecumenism

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1. Introduction

Often the history of different communions within the Christian church focuses on divisions rather than common practices, theological alignment, and harmony in worship. In the 21st century, there are many practices of the various Orthodox and evangelical spiritual traditions that are shared across the spectrum of Christian practice.[1] These common practices represent what may be understood as a synchronistic unity between Orthodox and evangelical traditions. Events or practices are "synchronistic" in this sense if they occur simultaneously despite different origins or meanings. Synchronicity is therefore distinct from unity and uniformity.

This article focuses on one specific common spiritual practice: icon veneration. Evangelical and Orthodox icon uses have different origins and vary in diverse theological understanding of icons, and each tradition is also internally diverse. Still, evangelical and Orthodox icon use share a praxis in the context of worship and therefore have a synchronistic unity.

This article argues that icon veneration has untapped ecumenical potential for building rapport and authentic fellowship opportunities within evangelical–Orthodox relationships, specifically as evangelicals receive the "gift" of icon veneration from the Orthodox tradition. Catholic Ecumenist Marie Farrell argues that ecumenism is best practiced as "an exchange of gifts, where each tradition maintains its integrity but receives the best of others" (Farrell 2014, pp. 2–7). This article uses Farrell's understanding of ecumenism as a lens to describe one aspect of dialogue between evangelical and Orthodox believers: Icon veneration is a gift of the Orthodox tradition that can benefit evangelicals. In order to evidence this thesis, the article covers three contemporary and constructive appropriations of the gift of icons:

the Evangelical Baptist Church of the Republic of Georgia (EBCG),[2] African American Orthodox believers and the contemporary writing of icons of Black saints, and evangelical worship endorsed by leaders like Rory Noland and his ministry Heart of the Artist. In each of these examples, evangelicals receive the gift of icon veneration, and by modifying the tradition to their own context, participate in synchronistic unity with the Orthodox Church.

Though tangential to our main argument, it is worth noting that the Orthodox mission also benefits from this exchange. Evangelical icon veneration increases the scope and influence of Orthodox teaching as many evangelicals turn to Orthodox communions for instructions. The Orthodox Church's mission is broadened by others learning from their traditions, even when it is modified. For example, the veneration and recognition of Black saints through icons, discussed below in Section 4, enriches the diversity of icons. Important to Farrell's conception of ecumenism is mutual exchange between traditions; however, this article focuses specifically on what evangelicals might receive from Orthodox believers' veneration and use of icons.

Before overviewing the history of icon veneration and analyzing three case studies of contemporary icon veneration, it is important to note other scholars and pastors who argue for the ecumenical power of icons. Hilda Kleiman, for example, establishes the ecumenical significance of icons for Catholic–Orthodox relations in *The Ecumenical Work of the Icon: Bringing the Iconographic Tradition to Catholic Seminaries*. She offers a Catholic perspective on icon use and encourages Catholics to venerate icons and appreciate their beauty (Kleiman 2018). In addition to Catholic engagement with icons, some pastors and leaders in Mainline Protestant denominations have incorporated the veneration of icons in their worship experiences.[3] Some Lutheran churches in the United States have benefited from adopting icon veneration as an essential component of their worship experience (Jensen 2001). For example, Jordan Cooper, pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in Watseka, Illinois, writes about why Lutherans might use the crucifix and icons to enhance their spiritual life (Cooper 2014):

> "We use them as tools to instruct and remind us of our faith. The crucifix is a constant reminder of the gospel. It is often placed in the sanctuary to remind both the pastor and the congregation that Christ, and his cross are the center of the church's worship life. We use images of saints to remind us of the great faith of those who have come before us, and remind us of the unity of the church in heaven and on earth."

As in some Lutheran congregations, a small group of evangelicals already venerate icons and encourage others to do the same, although there is little, if any, sustained academic treatment of the subject of evangelical use of icons.

This article is a small part of a much larger dialogue between evangelical and Orthodox believers, which tends to focus more on doctrinal compatibility than spiritual practices. Tim Grass argues that ecumenical dialogue ought to be relational and spiritual in nature. Icon use is a spiritual practice that can create more space for this type of exchange (Grass 2010, pp. 194–95). *Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism* shows the breadth of perspectives on this dialogue. Bradley Nassif, professor of biblical and theological studies at North Park University, defends the compatibility of Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism and aims to help the "Orthodox and evangelical worlds believe more positively about and act more constructively toward each other than they have to date," specifically for evangelicals to "reassess the comprehensiveness of their own incarnational Trinitarian faith" (Stamoolis 2004, p. 16). This article hopes to contribute to reflection on evangelical–Orthodox dialogue by considering the practice of icon veneration, even if doctrinal analysis will vary between Orthodox and evangelical believers, and even though icon veneration has been a point of tension historically between evangelical and Orthodox believers (Stamoolis 2004, p. 10). However, doctrinal disputes abound, so this article will continue by briefly describing the historical context of the controversies between iconoclasts and iconophiles, the significance of icons to the Orthodox tradition, and contemporary evangelical reflections on icon use.

While not all evangelicals support icon veneration, those who do remain squarely within the evangelical tradition.[4]

2. Icons and Iconoclasm

Prior to delving more deeply into specific practices of icon veneration, it is helpful to understand the context and history of the use of icons. Both the Orthodox and evangelical traditions to some extent view early church practices as normative for the contemporary church, so the historical iconoclastic arguments help give voice to contemporary evangelical debates over icons. "Icon" is the transliteration of the Greek word for "image". An icon is "a sign of the presence of God," and typically depicts a saint, biblical scene, or Jesus (Tradigo 2006, p. 6). Icons vary in size and location, from the iconostasis, which separates the nave from sanctuary in Eastern Orthodox churches to placement on the nightstand of an Orthodox believer. They are generally painted on wood and only use materials directly found in nature. Alfredo Tradigo, scholar of Christian iconography, argues that "The very materials the icons are made of are important: a carved wood panel covered with layers of gesso, glue, and canvas; colors made of vegetable and mineral pigments; water and egg yolk; and gold leaf. They all appear as elements of the sacred ritual" (Tradigo 2006, p. 7). As Orthodoxy Scholar and iconographer Mariamna Fortounatto and Byzantine specialist Mary Cunningham describe the process, "The icon painter 'frees' matter as he [sic] offers it back to God in his [sic] reverent creation of an image" (Fortounatto and Cunningham 2008, p. 136). Iconographic styles vary, but all require their painter's rigorous attention and prayerfulness. The painting is an act of worship just like the eventual veneration.[5]

The church has deliberated and engaged in theological discourse about the permissibility and benefit of using imagery and icons in worship from its very conception. Initial prohibitions on the use of icons and imagery based their restrictions on the second of the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20: 4–6 (NIV):

> "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."

Yet many in the early church viewed icons as representations of the living Christ as first exemplified through the *Mandylion*, a cloth imprinted with Jesus' face, understood to be the first icon and not made by human hands (Fortounatto and Cunningham 2008, p. 141). No examples of icons as they are known today survive from before the third century of Christianity, though many Orthodox believers claim they have always been present (Fortounatto and Cunningham 2008, p. 137).

Icon veneration has been formally recognized by the Orthodox church since the Seventh Ecumenical council in 787 CE, which distinguished between respect and veneration (*timētikē proskunēsis*, which can and ought to be given to icons) and true adoration (*latrēia*, which God alone merits, (Bulgakov 1931, pp. 1–2). Scholars debate when believers first painted and venerated icons, but many in the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions credit St. Luke as the first iconographer, writing an icon of the Virgin Mary holding the infant Jesus (Apostle and Evangelist Luke 2021). The early church historian Eusebius documents icon veneration as early as the fourth century CE (Eusebius 1890). It was not until the eighth century, though, that iconoclasm (opposition to icon veneration) gained government support when Byzantine Emperor Leo III issued multiple edicts condemning icon use (Treadgold 1997, pp. 350, 352–53).

One of the greatest debates about the question of the use of imagery and icons occurred during the eighth century in the Byzantine church between the iconoclasts and the iconophiles. Iconoclasts rejected and called for the destruction of religious images, whereas, iconophiles esteemed religious imagery as a reflection of the incarnational reality of Christ. According to Kenneth Parry in his book *Depicting the Word:* "Whereas the iconoclasts

regard Christian images as being no better than pagan idols, the iconophiles endeavor to distinguish their own images from those of the pagans" (Parry 1996, p. 44).

Saint John of Damascus wrote three treatises *On the Divine Images* as a rejection of iconoclasm citing Exodus 25: 18–20 regarding the decoration of the tabernacle, "And make two cherubim out of hammered gold . . . " (25: 18). St. John of Damascus argued the Incarnation itself is a kind of depiction of God as an image, thus the creation and use of icons must be permissible in Christian worship. Representing the perspective of the iconophiles, he offered a critique of the iconoclasts going so far as claiming they denied "the reality of Christ's human Incarnation" (Fortounatto and Cunningham 2008, p. 140). In defense of icon veneration, he argued that honoring an image is a form of honoring the person portrayed in that image, not the image as an end in itself (St. John of Damascus 2015).

The creation of icons comes from the Greek word *grapho* which more often denotes "painted" than "written," though sometimes the latter (Yiannias 2010). Dr. John Yiannias delivered a talk at the Orthodox Theological Society in America meeting in Chicago, Illinois, in 2008 and explained why it is important to not use the term "written" in referring to the creation of icons. He argued, God is "uncircumscribable [sic], unbounded, undepictable, incomprehensible, unsusceptible to containment within the boundaries that we must impose on anything before we can comprehend or speak of it" (Yiannias 2010). Thus, for Yiannias, the pictorial representations of icons must be understood theologically as conveying the greater act of sacredness in the production of the icon.

For evangelicals, and Protestants in general, there are several reasons for the lack of comfort with the veneration of icons including: fear their use is heretical and idolatrous, historical debate about their use in the context of the early church, and an unfamiliarity with the lives and contributions of the saints. Some early Protestant leaders such as John Calvin rejected the use of icons, and any form of imagery, claiming the omniscient and transcendent God is unknowable and beyond human comprehension. Other protestant leaders such as Luther accepted icon veneration, comparing it to the mental picturing of Jesus (Dorner 1871, vol. 1, p. 146). Thus, human attempts to paint, illustrate, and represent God will inherently be inadequate and will misrepresent the truth of his full revelation and divinity (Arakaki 2011).

Contemporary evangelicals debate whether the Incarnation of God in Jesus licenses icon veneration. Matthew Milliner, professor of Art History at Wheaton College disagrees, and asserts, God "depicted himself [sic] in the Incarnation, enabling us to, in turn, depict him [sic]" (Milliner 2010). Orthodox priest and professor at Duke Divinity School Edward Rommen concurs that "theologically, the church's teaching on images is grounded in the doctrine of the incarnation. God himself gave us an icon of himself in Christ and thereby, at least in principle, sanctioned the use of such imaging" (Rommen 2004, pp. 240–41). By contrast, Michael Horton, theology professor at Westminster Seminary California, infers from the Incarnation "precisely the opposite conclusion," namely, that Jesus "alone is God's univocal, if paradoxical, presence in flesh. The Reformed, therefore, are concerned that some Orthodox approaches to this question—and aspects of its liturgy that follow from them [including the use of icons]—reflect an under realized eschatology, living in the types and shadows while the Reality has come" (Horton 2004, p. 256). Thus, evangelicals work from similar sources of authority (the Incarnation) to ground their approach to icons.

A second reason for the resistance of evangelical engagement with icons has to do with the historical debate about how prevalent, if at all, they were used in the practice of worship by the early church. For example, the Gospel Coalition, a network of broadly Reformed evangelical churches, contends that icon veneration was not practiced in the early church and rather, "the archeological evidence gives us some examples of Christian imagery but not necessarily in places of worship and... there is no evidence that it ever went beyond decorations. The actual writings of the early church leaders are consistently opposed to the dangers of iconography" (Carpenter 2021). Nonetheless, other evangelical

leaders like Ed Stetzer of Wheaton College disagree and identify the practice of veneration within Eastern Orthodoxy as in "continuity with the early church" (Stetzer 2017).

Finally, evangelical and Protestant Christians do not formally venerate saints and thus imagery representing historical Christians who have been canonized is outside of traditional forms of worship, prayer, and the experience of the majority of Protestant Christians, including evangelicals.[6] Nonetheless, increasingly in the twentieth century, bridges are starting to be built with evangelical congregations and communities who have been exposed to the formal veneration of icons. More and more evangelical and other Protestant religious leaders and academics are seemingly shedding historic concern about the legitimacy of icons and instead claiming the veneration of icons as a constructive, legitimate form of worship. See, for example, the evangelical leaders from The Transforming Center and Rory Noland, of Heart of the Artist Ministries, discussed below and the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia.[7]

3. Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia (EBCG)

Rev. Dr. Malkhaz Songulashvili serves as the Metropolitan Bishop of the Evangelical Baptist Church of the Republic of Georgia and widely uses the veneration of icons in the context of worship. The Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia was founded in 1867 by Protestant Orthodox believers in Tbilisi, Georgia, over 150 years ago, because of theological dialogue and discussion among Orthodox dissidents (Songulashvili 2020). Bishop Songulashvili identifies himself and the church as a part of the Orthodox communion because of culture, liturgy, theology, and aesthetics; but he also shares some beliefs from the Radical Reformation which include believer's baptism, the significance of the Bible, and other secondary considerations like the separation of church and state. He believes the use of icons is an example of the synchronicity of orthodox practice and evangelical theological foundations because it represents the "natural amalgamation of the two traditions, both deeply rooted in the Gospel tradition" (Songulashvili 2020). Evangelicals come to icon veneration over decades, compared to the centuries over which the Orthodox Church has practiced and refined this spiritual practice, making the practice synchronous between evangelicals and Orthodox believers. Bishop Songulashvili further asserts the use of Orthodox liturgy represents the "ecumenical hospitality" and shared gifts between the Orthodox and evangelical traditions. While acknowledging differences with the Orthodox tradition, Bishop Malkhaz writes "that traditionally Orthodox Georgian culture could be an ally in [its] mission and not its foe" (Songulashvili 2015, p. 314). The ECBG claims to have been long receiving and combining the gifts of many traditions (Songulashvili 2015, p. 314).

This article intentionally does not take a stand on the controversy regarding the EBCG and its relationship to Orthodox communions. As a minority tradition within a mostly Orthodox country, it is important to voice their perspective as judiciously as possible. The authors do not wish to suggest anyone congregation separate from the Orthodox communion, or any communion. On the contrary, veneration of icons is a practice which can bring together traditions otherwise separated. Please see the appendices of Evangelical Christian Baptists of Georgia for more details.[8]

The Metropolitan Bishop asserts that Christians must learn to respect the integrity of other traditions and should "shift from proselytism to learning from others," adopting a missiological paradigm for the future that will allow for more shared practices and common fellowship (Songulashvili 2020). For example, Bishop Songulashvili practices an old Byzantine style of iconography and believes anyone who made a "big contribution to the Kingdom of God or to the implementation of the Mission of God" can be canonized and iconized. He cited as examples Martin Luther King, Jr.; the Sufi monastic, Jareda Rumi; and the Roman Catholic Mother Teresa as significant seekers of the justice and peace movement who helped further kingdom principles here on earth. Sainthood, for Bishop Songulashvili, is not about perfection, but rather "setting an example and encouragement to us in our attempts to follow Jesus". He continued, "God works through those created in his or her image, regardless of nationality, tribe, or religion" (Songulashvili 2020). This

does not imply universalism or negate the need for personal salvation, but is rather an understanding of God's love for all who bear the imago dei.

Bishop Songulashvili and his congregation do not identify as belonging solely to either the Orthodox communions, or evangelical churches. He claims that their practice of worship and ecumenicism is often "equally unacceptable" to both Orthodox and evangelical believers, but he believes that uniquely positions his church to be a witness to the mission of God's kingdom to both communities. He does this by remaining committed to working alongside churches and other Christian groups throughout Georgia including congregations within the Ukrainian Orthodox communion, despite disagreeing with some aspects of Orthodox and evangelical worship. As exemplified in their contemporary use of icons, the Bishop affirms his mission to "build bridges" between Jews, Muslims, and Yazedis and all people as an expression of the Christian faith.[9]

4. Icons of Black Saints

The use of icons by people of African descent extends beyond the traditional practices of African Orthodox church communities and includes viewing icons as symbolic representations of the liberating power of faith in Christ Jesus for Black people. According to the Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology, "The challenge for the iconographer is to paint human beings who already in their earthly lives have passed beyond the threshold of the Kingdom [sic]. The saints' experience of the divine must be translated so that the beholder may contemplate the Kingdom through the icon and acquire sanctification through the grace of the Holy Spirit, fulfilling what all God's creation is called to become" (Fortounatto and Cunningham 2008, p. 142). This transcendence takes on a unique meaning for Black Orthodox Christians who use icons that demonstrate African people and Black Americans as saints and elevate the roles of how African women contributed significantly to the history of Christianity. The use of Black icons, sometimes depicting African American heroes of the Civil Rights Movement, also might appeal to Black Christians from other traditions outside of the Orthodox Church. In addition, the painting of black icons cannot be considered appropriation, as many of the artists who paint Black saints are often members of The African Orthodox Church (AOC).

While this section focuses on icons of Black saints written in the Orthodox Church, many evangelicals share the same concerns that motivate the writing of these icons: a desire for spiritual nourishment, tangible connection between justice and worship, and anti-racist spiritual resources. Insofar as (some) evangelicals have these concerns, they may be drawn to venerate Black saints, thus sharing synchronistically in icon veneration with the AOC and other Orthodox believers venerating Black saints.[10]

The AOC has aimed since their founding in 1921 to address racial discrimination in the United States with the help of the Orthodox tradition. The AOC has always been committed to maintaining Black leadership on all levels, also mandating that Jesus be depicted as African. The AOC adopts icon veneration to these goals by canonizing and making icons of "modern-day saints as Martin Luther King, Marcus Garvey, the church's founder Alexander McGuire, and John Coltrane" (Kravchenko 2020, p. 90).

Elena Kravchenko writes in "Black Orthodox 'Visual Piety': People, Saints, and Icons in Pursuit of Reconciliation," "People of African descent had to take their rightful place—ideally, but first materially—within the broader worldwide Christian community of saintly figures" (Kravchenko 2020, p. 87). The use of black icons not only benefits the experience of African Orthodox worshipers, but has positive impacts on the broader community of Christians by aiding evangelism, promoting anti-racism, and aiding black identity formation in ways that help to cultivate virtue.

According to Kravechenko, the use of black icons represents the Christian community to people of color as "truly inclusive" and offers an invitation for non-believers to experience conversion and become a part of the community of believers. She asserts that evangelicals, and anyone interested in cultivating virtuous religious identity, would do well to venerate icons (Kravchenko 2020, p. 97). A practitioner named Michael affirms

the power of black icons and their evangelistic significance in his own narrative. He says, "Although I have appreciated the love the white brothers and sisters have given me, for a Black man to receive the faith from Black fathers is very powerful. In this way, I have come into Orthodoxy", Michael notes. "So many things have been answered for me—the Blackness, my Blackness, is finally being shown to me. Even though I always knew it was there, I never knew how it connected. Finally, somebody is not denying the fact that we exist, that we are part of God's family and purpose, and I needed that". He concluded, "When I come into the church, and I see the icons . . . I no longer see this white-skinned, blue-eyed Jesus that I grew up seeing... Then, to read about all the different saints and get the whole story and receive the tradition from the time of the Apostles has been powerful!" (Kravchenko 2020, p. 99).

Ethnically diverse icons are not new to the 21st century. D. Oliver Herbel, Orthodox priest and independent scholar, argues in *Turning to Tradition: Converts and the Making of an American Orthodox Church* that icons of St. Moses the Black in particular have been moving for Black believers (Herbel 2014, p. 91). Moses the Black was a fourth-century Ethiopian monk living in Egypt, honored as a Desert Father, depicted with black skin in icons. Herbel quotes Fr. Moses Berry, a contemporary Black Orthodox priest, arguing that "the tradition of the evangelist Matthew's proselytizing in Africa, Athanasius the Great's consecration of Bishop Frumentius, and the presence of 'countless Black saints and martyrs' all pointed to the importance of saints of African descent"(Herbel 2014, p. 92). Albert Raboteau, author of *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* and celebrated scholar of American religious history, compares his experience venerating Orthodox icons to his experience of slave spirituals, "overwhelmed by the spiritual power" of both (Raboteau 2002, p. 42). Raboteau details convergences between Orthodox spirituality and African American slave religion other than icon veneration in his afterword to *An Unbroken Circle: Linking Ancient African Christianity to the African-American Experience* (Raboteau 1997).

The use of black icons can also be a tool in aiding anti-racism efforts by providing powerful visual representations of black saints as good, holy, and connected to the divine. The power of marginalized people being represented in icons cannot be underestimated. Not only does the painting of black historic figures and women tell black people they too might attain saintly behavior and live out their faith in practice, but Kravchenko also gives reasons why any non-Orthodox believers might appreciate icon veneration. For example, black icon veneration helps white Americans "see African saints in order to think of and treat Black people as capable of saintly actions" (Raboteau 1997, p. 100). In this way, black icon veneration aids black identity formation and can also help to cultivate virtue.

Finally, white people can also reap the benefits of the veneration of icons of black historical figures. The painting of African American and African saints invites white people to resist their own internal prejudices and internalized racism and to experience fellowship with African American siblings who have fought for integration and against white supremacy, which ultimately contributes to the degradation of the souls of white people (Cone 1997, pp. 216–17). Kravchenko's descriptions of the use of icons in the African American community demonstrates how they are a blessing to those who venerate the icons and also the potential black icons have to build bridges across both ecumenical and racial divides.

5. Rory Noland and 'Heart of the Artist'

The veneration of icons outside of the Orthodox community and particularly by evangelicals presents one of the most significant opportunities for ecumical unity and bridge building between Orthodox and evangelical communities. This is exemplified in the ministry and teaching of Rory Noland, founder of Heart of the Artist Ministries.

Rory Noland represents one of the most significant educators of evangelical worship with a background in pastoral leadership at Willow Creek Community Church (WCCC) one of the most influential evangelical megachurches in the United States. He has published several books with the evangelical publisher Zondervan and uses icons both in his own

worship experience and in his teaching. For Noland, the veneration of icons are valuable for evangelicals in that they provide an invitation and opportunity for prayer. They draw believers toward the sacred and help evangelicals expand their understanding of worship.

Noland researched and began to embrace the use of icons in worship as a part of his research and writing for his foundational theology of worship in the book project Heart of the Artist. In addition to his personal use and writing, he teaches a session on the use of icons for The Transforming Center cohorts which predominantly include Protestant and evangelical pastors and Christian leaders (Noland 2021).[11] In addition, The Transforming Center has had a longstanding relationship with Northern Theological Seminary which is an evangelical academic institution connected to the American Baptist Churches USA.[12]

Over the course of his research and personal practice, Noland has visited Orthodox churches around the world, including in the United States, Romania, and Russia. His discovery of Orthodox icon veneration prior to major experience in the Orthodox tradition is synchronistic with Orthodox iconography: the practice is shared between the traditions but each tradition has a distinct timeline. While Rory, like many evangelicals, has a limited relationship with the Orthodox Church, his use of icons demonstrates their potential as a source of evangelical–Orthodox dialogue. The following discussion of Rory's views on and uses of icons serves to demonstrate how some evangelicals may conceive of icons for worship. This may encourage non-venerating evangelicals to consider icon use and also begin a dialogue with Orthodox believers about evangelical icon use and theology.

According to Noland, one of the first challenges for evangelicals includes a lack of understanding and theological context for how icons might be used in worship. Many evangelicals assume the use of icons means people are "worshiping the saints". Many evangelicals have suspicion of Catholic traditions and traditions of the Orthodox Church and assume they come from eastern traditions that are not rooted in Christianity. Ignorance of Orthodox traditions and lack of exposure to early church history contributes to these misconceptions. Rory Noland acknowledged that teaching people the "veneration of icons is not worshiping the saints" is one of the biggest challenges he faces in teaching about the use of icons to evangelicals. He experiences people often assuming that these are traditions of the East without understanding the significance of icons in the early church and how the use of icons flourished during the Byzantine Empire. Another challenge for many evangelicals, according to Noland, is that many come from Catholic backgrounds and have concerns that icon veneration reminds them of early church experiences they have tried to leave behind. Noland begins by assuring his students that the veneration of icons has its roots in early Christianity. He encourages people to step out of their comfort zone and to explore the use of icons in worship as a means of trying to get people to step "outside of their box" and to better understand traditions with which they may not be familiar or comfortable (Noland 2021).

For Noland, icons can constructively serve as a tool for prayer. He explains to evangelicals what it means to venerate icons, by showing them respect and honoring them, does not mean worshiping them. Icons bring people deeper into prayer. Noland describes, "When you sit before an icon, when you realize and point out the differences between an icon and a regular painting . . . [the icon] causes you to think because it expresses theological truth in a highly stylized and visual language" (Noland 2021). One has to learn how to use icons in the context of prayer and to "learn the language" of what the icon can teach and expose as one seeks to experience intimacy with the Creator. Noland continues, "Sitting in front of an icon is different than sitting in front of other art forms. You are drawn into the picture . . . into the scene, the theology of it". He describes the Trinity icon as a perfect example. He does not instruct people to sit in front of icons for hours, but rather to use icons as a "springboard for prayer" to help focus and not get distracted and to use the icon to draw one back into a posture of prayer. For evangelicals, the use of icons must be "very practical" so Noland attempts to provide practical ways for icons to be used in prayer and worship, trying to minimize apprehension, without taking the mystery out of the experience of icon veneration (Noland 2021).

Rory Noland believes icons work together with other aspects of the worship experience and "draw us toward the sacred". The sermon brings the power of the Word of God. The experience of the Eucharist and the Table bring an embodied experience of tasting and being welcomed into the mystery of communion. Icons, for Noland, access both the "head and the heart" which serves as a springboard for prayer and "bids you to linger in it" and to let go and invite God "deeper into your heart". The veneration of icons does not just incorporate head knowledge but "heartfelt knowledge that invites us into the presence of God". This is the beauty of the icon experience (Noland 2021). The power of the visual is that a deep theological truth is being communicated that you will never forget because the image will stay with you and when it is used time and time again will remind the participant of previous experiences.

Many evangelicals have limited and simplistic understandings of multifaceted aspects of worship and consider singing hymns and songs as the most common and significant form of worship. One of Noland's goals through Heart of the Artist Ministries is to expand evangelical understandings of worship to include diverse and creative use of many forms of art and spiritual practice beyond just that of music. He writes about how worship is a pathway for experiencing and encountering the divine in his book *Worship on Earth as it is in Heaven: Exploring Worship as a Spiritual Discipline.* For Noland, worship is very much about corporate prayer, the Word, the sacrament of the eucharist, and other forms of art that lead us into God's presence. Noland describes how icons introduce us and open us up to the sacred, he says, "That is the beauty of it. One thing I know, all Christians, all people whatever church they are from, whatever religion they may be, have a burning in their heart for the sacred because that represents our yearning for God and opens us up to the sacred". Noland's integration of icons exemplifies how evangelicals benefit from historic icon veneration that is so integral in Orthodox religious practice, thus sharing the practice synchronistically.

6. Conclusions

Icon veneration is ripe for ecumenical dialogue. The ECBG is a paradigmatic example of a bridge-building community, connecting evangelicals/baptists and Orthodox believers. Veneration of Black saints through icons is another place evangelicals and Orthodox believers committed to anti-racism can come together around common practices of worship. Rory Noland and his following exemplify how evangelicals might appropriate icon veneration for their own interests in spiritual growth, potentially leading them to want to learn more from the Orthodox traditions.

Evangelicals and others in the broader ecumenical community have much to learn and benefit from the veneration of icons as exemplified by Rory Noland and Heart of the Artist Ministries, the use of black icons as a mechanism of elevating historically marginalized people, and in the worship and experience of the Evangelical Baptist Church of the Republic of Georgia. From Bishop Songulashvili, the use of icons is one manifestation of what it means to live in harmony with Orthodox neighbors while practicing the Orthodox liturgy, holding onto evangelical theological beliefs, and also engaging in progressive social action. The painting of African American icons helps shed light on historic racial injustices and to invite evangelicals, white people, and others to esteem black Christians as saints of the church and a critical and essential part of the beloved community of the body of Christ. Finally, Rory Noland teaches how evangelicals and others are invited into prayer and drawn into the presence and experience of the sacred through the use of icons in the context of worship.

It is the hope of these authors that these individual case studies provide evidence for how the Holy Spirit is sowing unity at the level of synchronicity though not uniformity, even as there remain divisions on specific theological interpretations and on the level of doctrine. Our hope is that there might be further synchronism between these groups of believers in order for the experiences of shared practice to continue to build bridges and promote unity across the spectrum of Christian communions and denominations.

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Notes

1 For the purposes of this conversation, evangelicals might be understood using British historian David Bebbington's definition, Christians who are committed to biblicism, esteem for the Bible as Holy Scriptures inspired by God; crucicentrism, acknowledging the atoning work of Christ's death on the cross; conversionism, the necessity of being born again through belief into the body of Christ; and activism or mission, that the work of the church is the spreading of the Gospel into the world. See (Bebbington 1989, pp. 2–17). For the purposes of this article, Orthodox traditions refers specifically to "the local Churches of the Eastern Roman empire, including Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, as well as the Churches that came into being as a result of their missions". See (Cunningham and Theokritoff 2008).

2 The EBCG has a complicated history detailed in Bishop Songulashvili's (2015). It emerged from dialogue between Orthodox believers taking a protestant turn and Baptists looking for deeper liturgy. This article includes the EBCG as an evangelical use of icons because it is an autocephalous church, meaning, it determines its own head and is not subject to an external patriarch. While many of its practices are Orthodox, it is not formally a member of any Eastern Orthodox communion. Though highly controversial, the ECBG is also a paradigmatic example of a bridge-building community, adopting practices from both Orthodox and broadly evangelical traditions.

3 Many Anglicans also incorporate icon veneration into their devotional practice. See, for example, Crane's (2020) and Archbishop Nicholls's (2021), and Goebel's (2017).

4 This article focuses on official Orthodox teaching about icons. Growing evangelical-Orthodox dialogue about social practices in general and icon veneration in particular could also come to include discussion of lay people's icon veneration, which may stray from official Orthodox doctrine or standard evangelical teachings. Evangelicals can "receive the gift" of icon veneration from lay people as well as official Orthodox teaching.

5 For two contemporary iconographic methods, see Saint Seraphim's Saint Seraphim's Trust's (2021) and Monastery Monastery Icon's (2021).

6 It may be interesting to compare formal evangelical icon veneration to the informal veneration paid evangelical saints and missionary heroes, but that is beyond the scope of this article.

7 See also Mathewes-Green's (2003), and Transforming Center's endorsement of it: https://resources.transformingcenter.org/products/the-open-door-entering-the-sanctuary-of-icons-and-prayer (accessed on 5 January 2021).

8 See Songulashvili's (2015) appendices 8 and 11–15.

9 While it is beyond the scope of this article to give the full history of the EBCG's history even just in relation to icons, it is important to note that the church community plays an important role in their use of Orthodox practices in general and icon veneration in particular. See especially chapter 3 of Evangelical Christian Baptists of Georgia: The History and Transformation of a Free Church Tradition, "The Formation of the Georgian ECB's Institutional Identity (1942–1989)".

10 For further evidence of this, see Kelly Latimore, an evangelical producing diverse icons, and his store "Kelly Latimore Icons". See also (Lowes 2021).

11 Transforming Center: Strengthen the Soul of your Leadership, Homepage, https://transformingcenter.org/ (accessed on 5 January 2021).

12 See the American Baptist Churches USA homepage: https://www.abc-usa.org/ (accessed on 3 December 2020).

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Article

Spiritual Well-Being of Russian Orthodox and Evangelical Christians: Denominational Features

Konstantin S. Divisenko *, Alexei E. Belov and Olga V. Divisenko

Sociological Institute, Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology, Russian Academy of Sciences, 190005 St. Petersburg, Russia; alexeibelov2001@gmail.com (A.E.B.); olga.tupahina@gmail.com (O.V.D.)
* Correspondence: k.divisenko@socinst.ru

Abstract: Till the early 2000s, the Russian "religious renaissance" caused by the collapse of the USSR had been characterized by the rapid growth of religiosity. However, these spiritual changes had been occurring within the Russian Orthodox church and among Evangelical Christians in different manners. Evangelical communities are still relatively small; however their members are highly devoted to their traditions. Meanwhile, Orthodox religiosity is primarily characterized by the nominal self-identification of believers and relatively low level of religious practices' intensity. The article presents the study results (2017–2019) of the spiritual well-being of Orthodox and Evangelical Christians and its basic confessional and social determinants. The results demonstrate a strong correlation between the *enchurchment* level and the spiritual well-being level. The authors place particular emphasis on the role of religious coping that determines subjective well-being. The analysis confirmed that the positive ways of religious coping are determined by the regularity of religious practices and the believers' social capital. We interpret the peculiarities of Orthodox and Evangelicals' spiritual well-being in the light of differences between their church life's arrangements which are defined by the believers' practical religiosity and social capital.

Keywords: religiosity in Russia; spirituality; Orthodoxy; Protestantism; Evangelical Christians; subjective well-being; spiritual well-being scale; religious coping; Brief RCOPE Scale; enchurchment

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1. Introduction

"Religious renaissance" in Russia in the late 1980s can be interpreted as the consequence of the nonlinear and cyclic nature of Russian society's secularization (Sinelina 2009, pp. 15–17). This process was occurring along with contradictory tendencies: the significant number of conversions to traditional and nontraditional religions on the one hand, and the formation of the phenomenon of the so-called "faith with no affiliation" on the other (Davie 2006, p. 274). The latter has been predetermined by the high level of the Russians' cultural self-identification with Orthodoxy, which does not suggest a deep perception of Christian dogmas and institutionalized practices. Along with it, one can observe the formation of such the phenomenon as "nondenominational Christianity", when theologically and ethically people agree with Christian teachings but do not formally belong or affiliate themselves with any church.

In the 20th century, Russian Protestantism had been experiencing qualitative transformations as well: traditional Protestantism in Russia with its ethnic backgrounds (Lutheranism, Anglicanism, Methodism, Reformed churches etc.) was supplemented with Evangelical movements and churches (Baptist, Pentecostal, Charismatic, power-evangelical churches and missions etc.) (Lunkin 2015, p. 298). The affiliation with non-Orthodox confessions started to be identified not by traditional or ethnic foundations but with a person's free choice. The primary role belongs to the search for a new or alternative kind of spirituality. These phenomena probably represent the consequence of the transformation of religion's function in modern society when the church is primarily supposed to respond to people's special spiritual needs and demands.

According to various sociological surveys, most Russians identify themselves with Orthodoxy. In 1990, only 25% of the population considered themselves Orthodox, while in 1997—54% (Chesnokova 2005, p. 8). In 2012, 72% of Russia's population affiliated themselves with Orthodox church. However in 2014 this number reduced to 68% (Enchurchment of Orthodox Christians 2014) and got relatively stable since then. The given dynamics was accompanied with a relatively low level of religious participation: in the 2014 survey, 21% of the respondents indicated that they practically never go to church, 61%—that they never partake of the Eucharist, 79%—that they never fast, 30%—that they practically never pray, and 58%—that they have never read the Gospel or other scriptures. Due to this feature of Russian culture, self-identification seems to be a doubtful criterion of religiosity among the Orthodox. The academic discussion on the sociological dimension of religiosity and the problem of the latter's criteria that started 30 years ago stays relevant to the present day (Divisenko 2016; Lebedev et al. 2020; Prutskova et al. 2020).

The results of the Levada Center surveys suggest that the number of active/practising Christians in Russia has not significantly changed in the last two decades. There was a certain tendency to grow of the number of the respondents who attend church at least once a month (7% in 2003, 14% in 2013 and 12–18% in 2018–2019) (Public Opinion 2020, p. 121). The number of the respondents having intentions to observe Lent has never changed much—23–25% on average (ibid). Likewise, the number of the Orthodox who partake of the Eucharist once a month or oftener was not significantly changing from 1991 till 2014 (2–6% of those who consider themselves the Orthodox) (Emelyanov 2018, p. 35). Therefore, according to different evaluations, the number of active/practising Orthodox Christians varies from 4% to 25% (Sigareva and Sivoplyasova 2019; Emelyanov 2018, p. 46).

According to the results of representative surveys, the number of Protestants in Russia is about 1% (often in combination with Catholics). However, the expert assessment and calculation methodology that consider the number of registered religious organizations demonstrate that the number of Protestants (including Evangelicals) varies from 1 to 2.5 million people, i.e., 1.5% (Kargina 2014; Ivanenko 2018). It is noteworthy that in contrast to some Russians who consider themselves Orthodox but are not baptized or even do not believe in the existence of God, those who affiliate with some Protestant church or confession are usually active/practising Christians. In contrast to Orthodox parishes, membership in Protestant churches is typically stable. At the same time, there is a greater communal control and an excellent opportunity for the implementation of "grassroots" initiatives (Simonov 2018).

Mass surveys indicate that the religious faith in public opinion in last decades is seen as the significant factor affecting daily life. According to the representative survey conducted by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center in 2016, 55% of the Russians consider that religion helps them in their daily life. It is noteworthy that compared to 1990, this number doubled (Fyodorov 2016, pp. 7–8). Likewise, the number of the respondents who rely on God in their daily life and feel His presence nearly doubled: 25% in 1991 and 47% in 2016 (ibid). One may assume that religious beliefs are even more significant in the common system of self-regulation for practising Christians. However, this assumption is yet to be approved.

The Soviet ideological system practically excluded the development of Russian sociology of religion from world science. Many scales and questionnaires developed by American and European sociologists and psychologists of religion (Hill and Hood 1999) were unavailable to Russian scholars for a long time. For this reason, the problem of the interrelation of subjective well-being and individual religiosity and spirituality has been insufficiently studied. The major goal of our research project ("Spirituality and Subjective Well-being: The Methods of Sociological Research", Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR), No 16-06-00138) was designed to partially close this gap via adaptation and validation of the most significant measures for their following use in Russian cultural context. In this paper, we would like to sum up our major discoveries.

Usually, empirical studies of subjective well-being in the context of spirituality and religiosity investigate the level of well-being among religious respondents and correlating variables and/or analyse the impact of spirituality/religiosity on life satisfaction. In the case of practising Christians, the significant determinant of life perception and evaluation is the sense of God's presence and His assistance in daily life, which relates to theological and ethical foundations of Christianity. The sense of belonging to the divine is closely connected with the sense of the meaning of life and positively correlates with subjective well-being (Jung 2015; Casas et al. 2009).

Several studies clearly demonstrate that religious faith positively affects the people in hardships or with serious diseases, i.e., those who experience objective severe and negative factors (e.g., Daaleman 1999; Hasson-Ohayon et al. 2009). Religious and spiritual beliefs influence the existential narratives of the sick people and helps them cope with hardships caused by diseases (Finocchiaro et al. 2014; Sacco et al. 2014; Duran et al. 2020). It is empirically approved that the variable characterising one's satisfaction with own religiosity and spirituality provides a significant impact on Christian respondents' overall evaluation of their life (Wills 2009).

It is noteworthy that culture is another significant factor determining both subjective well-being of Christians and validity of methodological tools (Lavrič and Flere 2008; Shiah et al. 2016). The study of the quality of life in Eastern countries (collectivist cultures) demonstrated that it is often hard to apply western methods to local contexts due to their individualistic foundations and values (Kwon 2008).

Our analysis of various social studies of subjective well-being in the context of religiosity and spirituality has led us to a number of conclusions that are important for conducting such studies in the context of Russian religiosity. It can be claimed that subjective well-being must be studied as the multidimensional phenomenon using of various scales that relate to cognitive and affective components, such as religious/spiritual/subjective well-being, life satisfaction and its different aspects, presence of negative and positive emotions, etc. Within the sociological analysis, it is also important to determine the behavioural component of well-being, for instance, the interrelation between subjective well-being and religious practice in the course of coping with various hardships. As long as research on subjective well-being is based not only on the respondents' evaluation of their own life but also on the objective indicators, it is important within empirical studies to control the influence of such factors as gender, age, ethnicity, education, marital status, intensity of religious practices, frequency of prayer, etc. The connection between religiosity and subjective well-being can be either immediate or depending on other factors (so-called "well-being mediators"), such as the sense of purpose, practical affiliation with a religious community, sense of hope, self-evaluation, values (both individual and cultural), etc.

The following section briefly presents the results of our studies of Christians' spiritual well-being and its correlation with religiosity and the determinants of religious coping (religiously framed adaptive strategies that reduce stress).

2. Results

2.1. Christians' Spiritual Well-Being

Spirituality as the highest level of a person's formation and self-direction (Leontiev 2009, p. 217) is a phenomenon that is hard to operationalise within empirical studies without unavoidable reduction. However various tests and scales are being used to analyse spirituality. Index of Core Spiritual Experiences by J. D. Kass et al. (1991) is applied to describe spiritual experiences that lead to the formation of an individual's belief in the existence of God. Spiritual Assessment Inventory by Hall and Edwards (2002) aims to analyse one's spiritual maturity that depends on his or her awareness of God and quality of relations with Him. Mysticism Scale by R. W. Hood (1975) emphasizes analysing of an individual's experience of the transcendent, i.e., how he or she perceives "the spiritual world".

Our research used Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS) (Paloutzian and Ellison 1982) based on the two-dimensional spirituality model. The first (religious well-being (RWB)) reflects a person's experience of the connection with God. The second (existential well-being (EWB)) is expressed in his or her satisfaction with life and whether a person has positive emotions in how he or she perceives his or her life experience.

The SWBS consists of the twenty items, ten of which relate to the RWB subscale and the other ten to the EWB subscale. The religious and existential well-being level is defined by the sum of points on the respective items (from 10 to 60), while the spiritual well-being scale score results from the summation of the two subscales (from 20 to 120, accordingly). The higher scores—the higher well-being level. It should be noted that the normative scores on the scales depend on various factors, such as gender, age, religious or confessional affiliation, etc. (Bufford et al. 1991). The evaluation of well-being level can also be calculated via the comparison with conventional norms. Religious and existential well-being levels are evaluated in complying with the following rates: low (10–20), average (21–49), and high (50–60) accordingly. The rates for the spiritual well-being scale are 20–40, 41–99 and 100–120 accordingly (Fabbris et al. 2017).

We translated SWBS into Russian and adapted it for use in the interdenominational comparative perspective—in relation to the Orthodox and the Protestants (see Appendix A). Relying on the literature analysis, materials from Christian websites and the biographical interviews with Christians that we had conducted previously, we adapted the Russian version of the scale to the contemporary peculiarities of Russian Christian environments. This qualitative data allowed us to select the universal words and phrases to bring the scale items into accordance with the spiritual experience of the believers. For instance, we could not use the literal translation of "relationship with God" in case of the Orthodox, that is used in several SWBS items ("I have a personally meaningful relationship with God", "I do not have a personally satisfying relationship with God", "My relationship with God helps me not to feel lonely" and some others). Due to the interviews, we found that the Orthodox speak about the presence of God in their life. Therefore, in these items, we asked them about the presence of God instead of "relationship with God".

SWBS scores for negatively worded items (1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 12, 13, 16 and 18) were reversed before statistical analysis. Descriptive statistic was used for the analysis of participants' socio-demographic characteristics, religious behaviour, and for the SWBS scores. The internal consistency and reliability of the SWBS were determined using Cronbach's α. We used Spearman's rank correlation because of non-normal distribution of SWBS total and subscales. Due to the same reason, non-parametric tests (Mann–Whitney U-test and Kruskal-Wallis test) were used to compare SWBS scores between independent groups.

The invitation to participate in the survey was primarily addressed to practising Christians via social media and Christian e-newsletters. In 2017, 560 respondents took part in the survey, 158 of which are the Orthodox Christians. As to the Protestants (402 respondents), 37.3% are members of Pentecostal churches, 28.9% are Evangelical Christians-Baptists, 9% are Evangelicals, and 24.9% are members of independent communities not affiliated with any Christian denominational unions and associations. Few respondents are Lutherans, Adventists, Presbyterians, members of Messianic communities, etc. The quantitative emphasis on the Protestants is caused by our desire to reveal differences not only between the Orthodox and Protestants, but also within the Protestant/Evangelical environment (between Charismatics and members of other Evangelical churches).

Most of the Orthodox respondents were women (72.8%). As to the Evangelical Christians, 53.7% of the respondents were men. The average age was 39 (standard deviation—12.6). 83% of the Orthodox respondents have higher education degrees (56.9% among the Protestants). 52.5% of the Orthodox and 68.9% of the Evangelicals are married. 49.9% of the Protestants have two or more children (30.7% among the Orthodox) (Table 1).

Table 1. Participant characteristics (n = 560).

Characteristic	Orthodox (n = 158)	Protestants (n = 402)
	%	%
Gender		
Male	27.2	53.7
Female	72.8	46.3
Marital status		
Single	34.8	24.9
Married	52.5	68.9
Divorced	10.1	4.5
Widowed	2.5	1.7
Number of children		
None	44.2	35.9
1	25.1	14.2
2	22.4	18.2
3	6.4	16.2
≥4	1.9	15.5
Education level		
≤Post-secondary education	13.8	34.6
Incomplete higher education	3.2	8.5
Higher education	74.1	52.2
Academic degree	8.9	4.7

The variables describing religious behaviour (frequency of church attendance, participation in sacraments and Eucharist, Bible reading, private prayer) (Chesnokova 2005) were used for measurement of religiosity (Table 2).

Table 2. Participant religious behaviour (n = 560).

Frequency of	Orthodox (n = 158)	Protestants (n = 402)
	%	%
Private prayer		
Less than once a month	3.8	0.5
Once a month	1.9	1.0
Once a week	2.5	0.2
Several times a week	10.2	5.0
Once a day	35.0	33.3
Several times a day	46.6	60.0
Bible reading		
Never	5.1	0.0
A long time ago	17.2	0.5
Few months ago	10.8	1.2
Less than once a month	9.6	2.7
Once a month	7.0	1.0
Several times a month	10.2	4.2
Once a week	6.4	6.0
Several times a week	12.7	19.9
Daily	21.0	64.4

Table 2. *Cont.*

Frequency of	Orthodox (n = 158)	Protestants (n = 402)
	%	%
Church attendance		
Rare (once a few years)	1.9	1.2
Once per year	3.8	0.5
Once every three months	5.1	0.0
>4 and ≤11 times per year	9.6	0.5
Once a month	17.2	4.5
Once a week	47.8	42.3
Several times a week	14.6	51.0
Participation in Eucharist		
Never	3.8	1.2
Rarely (once a few years)	11.5	2.2
Once per year	7.0	0.7
Once every three months	10.8	3.5
>4 and ≤11 times per year	15.3	12.4
Once a month	26.1	73.6
Once a week	22.9	5.2
Several times a week	2.5	1.0

The proportion of participants who prayed at least once a day, and at the same time read the Bible at least once a week, attended the church once a week and partook in Eucharist at least every month among Protestant and Orthodox respondents was 71.4% and 25.9%, respectively. This active/practising group of participants we, conventionally, denote as churched believers.

The validity of the Spiritual Well-Being Scale was determined by correlation analysis with other subjective well-being scales and tests—Purpose in Life Test (PL) (Crumbaugh and Maholick 1981; Leontiev 2000) and Satisfaction with Life Scale (SL) (Diener et al. 1985; Osin and Leontiev 2020). It was found strong correlation between scores of SWBS and PL ($\rho = 0.684$, $p < 0.000$) and SWBS and SL ($\rho = 0.611$, $p < 0.000$), indicating good validity. The high level of internal consistency between SWBS items (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.854$) has been confirmed as well (Table 3).

Table 3. Correlation and internal consistency of the scales.

Variables	RWB	EWB	SWB	PL	Cronbach's α
Religious well-being (RWB)	1				0.757
Existential well-being (EWB)	0.520	1			0.813
Spiritual well-being (SWB)	0.777	0.920	1		0.854
Purpose in Life Test (PL)	0.490	0.694	0.684	1	0.923
Satisfaction with Life Scale (SL)	0.343	0.664	0.611	0.675	0.817

The means and standard deviations of participants' RWB, EWB and SWB scores were 55.6 ± 5.8, 50.5 ± 8.2 and 106.2 ± 12.3, respectively. A statistical distinction between the well-being of Orthodox and Protestant participants was found. RWB, EWB and SWB scores for Orthodox Christians are lower ($p < 0.000$, Mann–Whitney U-test) (Table 4).

Table 4. Descriptive analysis of the Spiritual Well-Being Scale.

Scale	Denomination	Mean ± Standard Deviation	Median
Religious well-being	Orthodoxy	53.6 ± 7.2	56
	Protestantism	56.4 ± 5.0	59
Existential well-being	Orthodoxy	47.3 ± 9.1	50
	Protestantism	51.8 ± 7.4	54
Spiritual well-being	Orthodoxy	101.0 ± 13.5	105
	Protestantism	108.2 ± 11.2	111

As to the representatives of various Protestant churches, no significant difference between spiritual well-being levels has been discovered. The Orthodox Christians with a high level of spiritual well-being (100 + scores) are 64.3%, and the Evangelicals—82.8%. Comparing representatives of different genders and levels of education, no significant difference of well-being levels has been found neither among the Orthodox nor among the Evangelicals. As to the Evangelicals, there is a weak direct correlation between the age and RWB ($\rho = 0.119$; $p = 0.017$) and EWB ($\rho = 0.182$; $p = 0.000$) and, therefore, SWB ($\rho = 0.177$; $p = 0.000$). EWB, as well as SWB scores, are significantly higher among married Orthodox, compared with single or divorced (p of Kruskal-Wallis test is 0.010 and 0.031, respectively). The same connection with the marital status is confirmed among the Evangelicals ($p = 0.000$). Furthermore, the Evangelical parents have a higher level of existential and spiritual well-being ($p = 0.000$); no such connection has been discovered among the Orthodox.

We found a statistically significant correlation between all scores of religious behaviour variables (private prayer, Bible reading, church attendance, participation in Eucharist) and scores of RWB for all participators. EWB scores correlate directly with scores of religious behaviour variables only for Protestants (Table 5).

Table 5. Correlation between religious behaviour and spiritual well-being (Spearman's rank correlation).

Variables	Orthodox			Protestants		
	RWB	EWB	SWB	RWB	EWB	SWB
Religious well-being	1	0.338 ***	0.723 ***	1	0.548 ***	0.780 ***
Existential well-being	0.338 ***	1	0.852 ***	0.548 ***	1	0.936 ***
Private prayer	0.327 ***	0.022	0.207 **	0.318 ***	0.305 ***	0.337 ***
Bible reading	0.300 ***	0.023	0.191 *	0.262 ***	0.268 ***	0.297 ***
Church attendance	0.371 ***	−0.003	0.223 **	0.141 **	0.214 ***	0.202 **
Participation in Eucharist	0.228 **	−0.020	0.136	0.167 **	0.195 **	0.199 ***

Note. RWB—Religious Well-being Scale, EWB—Existential Well-being Scale, SWB—Spiritual Well-being Scale. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

The churched believers among Orthodox participants had a higher level only of religious well-being than other Orthodox respondents (mean of scores was 56.3 and 52.7, respectively). As to the more active/practising subgroup of the Protestants, all the three scales demonstrate the significantly higher levels of well-being (mean of RWB, EWB, and SWB scores for churched subgroup and other Protestants were 57.1/54.5, 53.0/48.7 and 110.2/103.2, respectively).

The confirmed significant positive correlation between the level of practical religiosity and the level of spiritual well-being, regardless of confessional affiliation, had raised the question on the search for religious mechanisms of coping that affect subjective well-being.

2.2. Religious Coping

Mechanisms of coping with life obstacles significantly depend on a person's interpretation of adverse events, resulting from a person's worldview and practical daily life logic. Religion and spirituality serve as serious resources that usually let people cope with hardships in everyday life and also during crises and rough periods (Divisenko and Belov 2017).

To conduct the comparative study of religious coping among the Orthodox and the Protestants, we translated into Russian and tested Brief RCOPE. The particular coping methods are consolidated into the two groups within this measure—positive and negative (Pargament et al. 1998; Pargament et al. 2000). The first one unites the methods that allow religious persons to cope with stress with no adverse consequences. Among these are forgiveness, spiritual support, re-evaluation of adverse events and other managing forms that help people live through adverse circumstances, form a sense of spiritual unity with others, and sustain the positive world perception. Negative coping methods are characterized by the perception of negative events as punishment and are based on such feelings as offence, regret, lack of connection with God and doubts about God's omnipotence and love. Negative coping may serve as the evidence for one's inner spiritual tension and struggle that is likely to have negative consequences for a person due to the transformation of stress into a cognitive pattern of interpreting various events of personal history and experience.

Participants' characteristics and Brief RCOPE scores were analysed by descriptive statistics. Correlations of Brief RCOPE scores with independent variables scores were analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient. We conducted stepwise regression to determine the unique contribution of the variables included in the study on the Brief RCOPE subscales.

In 2018, 409 Christians took part in our religious coping study: 176 Orthodox and 233 Protestants (Evangelicals—13.3%; Evangelical Christians-Baptists—15.9%; Pentecostals—44.2%; members of other churches—26.6%). The invitation to participate in the survey was also (as in 2017) addressed to practising Christians via social media and Christian e-newsletters. We sent the request to fill in the questionnaire to those who had shared their email in the 2017 study.

Most Orthodox respondents are women (77.3%). The average age was 38. 81.2% have higher education degrees. 51.7% are married, 28.4% are single, 53.3% have child/children. More than half (54.9%) of the Protestant respondents are women. The average age was 42. The largest proportion have higher education degrees (58.8%), 66.9% are married, 21.5% are single, 67.0% have child/children (Table 6).

Table 6. Participant characteristics (n = 409).

Characteristic	Orthodox (n = 176)	Protestants (n = 233)
	%	%
Gender		
Male	22.7	45.1
Female	77.3	54.9
Marital status		
Single	28.4	21.5
Married	51.7	66.9
Divorced	11.4	7.7
Widowed	5.1	3.0
Other	3.4	0.9
Number of children		
None	46.7	33.0
1	23.3	16.3
2	18.6	23.2
3	7.4	17.6
≥4	4	9.9
Education level		
≤Post-secondary education	12.0	30.0
Incomplete higher education	6.8	11.2
Higher education	73.8	54.9
Academic degree	7.4	3.9

Most Orthodox respondents are active/practising Christians. 17.0% of them go to church several times a week, 44.9%—once a week, 15.9%—several times a month. 27.8% partake of the Eucharist once a week or oftener, 21.6%—once a month or oftener, but not weekly, 18.8%—5–11 times a year. 38.6% pray several times a day, 39.8%—at least once a day. 18.8% read the Bible on a daily basis, 11.9%—several times a week. 9.7% read the Bible at least once a month, 17%—several times a month. As to Protestant religious behaviour patterns, 53.6% pray several times a day, 34.8%—at least once a day, 10.3% several times a week. 62.7% read the Bible daily, 24.9% at least once a week. 53.2% go to church several times a week, 36.5%—once a week. 65.7% partake of the Eucharist once a month or more frequently, but not weekly, 10.7%—weekly or several times a week, 21.5%—less frequently than once a month (Table 7). Notably, the largest proportion of the Orthodox (44.9%) had only "a few" acquaintances in church; the according share of acquaintances among the Protestants was only 6.9%. The proportion of the participants acquainted almost with everyone was 9.7% and 50.2% for the Orthodox and the Protestants, respectively. The number of friends in the church was similarly differentiated: church members represent the main circle of friends for 54.9% of the Protestants and only for 12.5% of the Orthodox. There was no significant difference in the distribution of responses about critical life events over the past year by the confession. About 55% of respondents have experienced significant hardships, and about 40%—insignificant hardships.

Table 7. Participant religious behaviour and general characteristics (n = 409).

Frequency of	Orthodox (n = 176)	Protestants (n = 233)
	%	%
Private prayer		
Less than once a month	5.1	0.4
Once a month	2.8	0.9
Once a week	2.8	0.0
Several times a week	10.8	10.3
Once a day	39.8	34.8
Several times a day	38.6	53.6
Bible reading		
Never	3.4	0.0
A long time ago	15.3	1.7
Few months ago	8.0	0.4
Less than once a month	12.5	3.4
Once a month	3.4	2.6
Several times a month	17.0	4.3
Once a week	9.7	8.2
Several times a week	11.9	16.7
Daily	18.8	62.7
Church attendance		
Rare (once a few years)	5.1	3.0
Once per year	5.1	1.3
Once every three months	4.0	0.4
>4 and ≤11 times per year	8.0	1.7
Once a month	15.9	3.9
Once a week	44.9	36.5
Several times a week	17.0	53.2

Table 7. *Cont.*

Frequency of	Orthodox (n = 176)	Protestants (n = 233)
	%	%
Participation in Eucharist		
Never	6.8	2.1
Rarely (once a few years)	12.5	3.0
Once per year	5.7	1.3
Once every three months	6.8	5.2
>4 and ≤11 times per year	18.8	12.0
Once a month	21.6	65.7
Once a week	24.4	8.6
Several times a week	3.4	2.1
Proportion of acquaintances in church		
No acquaintances	16.5	1.7
A few	44.9	6.9
Many	27.8	41.2
Acquainted almost with everyone	9.7	50.2
Friends in church		
Main circle of friends	12.5	54.9
Some friends and acquaintances	43.8	40.3
Almost none	33.0	1.7
Hard to say	9.7	3
Critical life events over the past year		
None	2.3	5.2
Insignificant hardships	40.3	39.9
Significant hardships	56.3	54.9

The results of the study demonstrate that the respondents mostly use positive religious coping. Normative mean scores ranged from 17 to 21 for the Positive religious coping subscale (PRC) and 8 to 14 for the Negative religious coping subscale (NRC) (Pargament et al. 2011). In our study, mean PRC subscale scores were 23.43 and 24.91 for the Orthodox, and the Protestants, respectively, significantly higher than the normative mean. Mean NRC subscale scores (13.72 and 13.25 for the Orthodox, and the Protestants, respectively) accorded with the results of the other studies. Table 8 displays the descriptive analysis of the Brief RCOPE.

Table 8. Descriptive analysis of the Brief RCOPE subscales.

Subscales	Denomination	Mean	Standard Deviation
Positive religious coping (PRC)	Orthodoxy	23.43	4.22
	Protestantism	24.91	2.90
Negative religious coping (NRC)	Orthodoxy	13.72	4.08
	Protestantism	13.25	3.49

The methods of religious coping in our research do not depend on basic social and demographical characteristics (gender, age, education, marital status, etc.). The correlation between Brief RCOPE subscales and other variables included in the study is presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Correlation between Brief RCOPE subscales and the variables included in the study.

Variables	Orthodox (n = 176)		Protestants (n = 233)	
	PRC	NRC	PRC	NRC
Positive religious coping (PRC)	1	0.237 **	1	0.197 **
Negative religious coping (NRC)	0.237 **	1	0.197 **	1
Private prayer	0.538 ***	0.104	0.445 ***	–0.126
Bible reading	0.347 ***	0.083	0.369 ***	–0.103
Church attendance	0.472 ***	0.221 **	0.150 *	–0.099
Participation in Eucharist	0.430 ***	0.172 *	0.239 ***	–0.059
Proportion of acquaintances in church	0.253 **	0.103	0.247 ***	–0.100
Proportion of friends in church	0.231 **	–0.056	0.295 ***	–0.056
Religious socialization	0.083	0.029	–0.067	–0.204 **
Critical life events	0.103	0.294 ***	0.148 *	0.174 **

* $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$.

There was a statistically significant direct correlation between PRC subscale and private prayer, Bible reading, church attendance, participation in Eucharist, the proportion of acquaintances in church, the proportion of friends in church for all the respondents. In addition, the positive religious coping was connected with experience with life troubles in the past year among the Protestants. As to the Orthodox, the NRC subscale was directly correlated with church attendance, participation in Eucharist, critical life events over the past year, and to the Protestants—with critical life events and the lack of primary religious socialization (the index based on such variables as the significance of faith for parents, the religiosity of each parent and the frequency of attending Sunday school in childhood).

A stepwise linear regression analysis was performed to explore the factors affecting the positive and negative forms of religious coping. We analysed each form of religious coping and separately for the Orthodox and the Protestants. As religious coping predictors we considered religious behaviour variables, primary religious socialization, number of acquaintances and friends in church, and the number of serious life problems during the last year. The models summary and coefficients are shown in Tables 10 and 11.

Table 10. Stepwise regression analysis on prediction of positive religious coping.

Orthodox Participants					
Independent Variables	**B**	**SE**	**β**	***t***	***p***
constant	21.178	1.820		11.636	0.000
Private prayer	1.127	0.300	0.327	3.759	0.000
Church attendance	0.845	0.250	0.294	3.383	0.001
Note: $R = 0.560$, $R^2 = 0.314$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.305$, $F = 34.3$, $p < 0.001$.					
Protestant Participants					
Independent Variables	**B**	**SE**	**β**	***t***	***p***
constant	3.740	0.192		19.432	0.000
Private prayer	0.161	0.034	0.310	4.705	0.000
Bible reading	0.054	0.019	0.187	2.880	0.004
Proportion of acquaintances in church	0.094	0.042	0.139	2.216	0.028
Proportion of friends in church	0.099	0.049	0.126	2.006	0.046
Note: $R = 0.545$, $R^2 = 0.296$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.283$, $F = 22.4$, $p < 0.001$.					

Table 11. Stepwise regression analysis on prediction of negative religious coping.

Orthodox Participants					
Independent Variables	**B**	**SE**	**β**	***t***	***p***
constant	−0.576	2.598		−0.222	0.825
Critical life events	2.238	0.553	0.303	4.047	0.000
Church attendance	0.913	0.231	0.330	3.955	0.000
Proportion of friends in church	−1.574	0.510	−0.256	−3.084	0.002
Note: $R = 0.416$, $R^2 = 0.173$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.157$, $F = 10.4$, $p < 0.001$.					
Protestant Participants					
Independent Variables	**B**	**SE**	**β**	***t***	***p***
constant	1.347	0.174		7.727	0.000
Religious socialization	−0.142	0.042	−0.219	−3.401	0.001
Critical life events	0.186	0.056	0.221	3.326	0.001
Private prayer	0.102	0.041	0.165	2.478	0.014
Note: $R = 0.336$, $R^2 = 0.113$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.100$, $F = 9.1$, $p < 0.001$.					

Regression analysis demonstrated that in the case of all the respondents PRC score was defined by the frequency of private prayer. In addition, the frequency of Church attendance for Orthodox, the frequency of Bible reading, number of acquaintances and friends for the Protestants were statistically significantly related to participators' positive religious coping.

Critical life events over the past year were found as a predictor of negative religious coping for all the respondents. The negative forms of religious coping, in the case of the Orthodox, are associated with the more frequent church attendance and lack or low number of friends among church members. As to the Protestants, the negative forms of coping are affected by lack of primary religious socialization and low frequency of prayer. It should be noted, that although the R^2 value was low in two models of negative religious coping, the p values of the F test were less than 0.001, showing a strong correlation of the interpretative power of the models. However this finding requires a deeper study of the negative religious coping factors.

3. Discussion and Conclusions

The significant direct connection between enchurchment (as the active participation in private and church religious practices) and spiritual well-being, discovered in the course of our study, regardless of the confessional affiliation, led to the conclusion that practical religiosity plays a positive role in participants' perception of their own life.

The study of the Christians' religious coping has confirmed the importance of religious beliefs in dealing with serious life events/crises. As initially supposed, the differences in spiritual life are partly due to the varying degrees of involvement in the church community, which is *a priori* determined by the confessional dispensation. Thus, this has been affirmed that the social capital (number of friends and acquaintances in church) promotes positive methods of religious coping.

It is noteworthy that there is the significant limitation of our research. The use of social media and Christian e-newsletters for recruiting participants in our studies determined the samples consisted of practising and active Christians. The majority of them lived in large cities and had higher education degrees. It probably explains the high scores for the religious, spiritual well-being and positive religious coping. We consider that it is not right to apply these results to other believers' groups.

We can agree with the opinion that "today religiosity fulfils the functions of social solidarity and social consolidation, lost by the state and not yet formed by civil society" (Ryzhova 2017, p. 58). Trends of the inversion of Orthodoxy into a civil religion in modern Russia are partly based on the peculiarities of Russian Orthodox spirituality. Mother Maria Skobtsova identified several types of piety that have historically developed in Orthodoxy;

among them the two most "spiritually dead" are "Synodal" and "Ritualistic" (Skobtsov 2001). The first is associated with nationalism and the "great-power Russian idea", the second emphasizes external formalistic rituals to the detriment of the inner experience of the sacred. Both types are oriented primarily towards tradition and form, with the Gospel (as 'message of Christ') and its understanding by believers in worship and spiritual life relegated to the background. For this reason, future researches may focus on explaining confessional differences in spiritual well-being by the different role of the Gospel in the spiritual life of Christians. It may be assumed, that while Evangelical Christians yearn to have the Gospel at the centre of their spiritual life, many Orthodox Christians, as Bradley Nassif notes, are "surrounded by theological riches but living in spiritual poverty" (Nassif 2021). However, the connection between religiosity, involvement in the church community (social capital), and spiritual well-being among representatives of various churches requires further comparative studies.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Russian version of the Spiritual Well-Being Scale.

Item	Russian Translation
1.	Мне не приносит утешение молитва, когда я обращаюсь к Богу наедине.
2.	Я точно не знаю, зачем я живу.
3.	Я верю, что Бог любит меня и заботится обо мне.
4.	Я воспринимаю жизнь как некий положительный опыт.
5.	Я полагаю, что Бог—это некая безличная высшая сила, для которой моя повседневная жизнь безразлична.
6.	Я не уверен в своем будущем.
7.	У меня есть опыт молитвы и общения с Богом.
8.	Я вполне доволен и удовлетворен своей жизнью.
9.	Я не чувствую, что Бог дает мне силы и поддерживает меня.
10.	В целом я доволен тем, как складывается моя жизнь.
11.	Я ощущаю поддержку и участие Бога в трудных обстоятельствах моей жизни.
12.	Я не особенно доволен своей жизнью.
13.	Обращение к Богу не приносит мне умиротворения.
14.	Я оптимистично смотрю на своё будущее.
15.	Ощущение присутствия Бога позволяет мне чувствовать себя не одиноким.
16.	Моя жизнь полна невзгод и страданий.
17.	Я чувствую себя лучше всего, когда переживаю непосредственную связь с Богом.
18.	Жизнь не имеет особого смысла.
19.	Вера в Бога влияет на моё ощущение благополучия.
20.	Я верю, что моя жизнь имеет смысл.

Note: The odd-numbered items correspond to the items of Religious Well-being subscale, and the even-numbered items correspond to the items of Existential Well-being subscale.

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Monasticism—Then and Now

John Binns

Centre of World Christianity, SOAS University of London, London WC1H 0XG, UK; Jb344@cam.ac.uk

Abstract: The monastic tradition has its roots in the New Testament practices of withdrawing into the desert, following a celibate lifestyle and disciplines of fasting. After the empire became Christian in the 4th century these ascetic disciplines evolved into monastic communities. While these took various forms, they developed a shared literature, gained a recognised place in the church, while taking different ways of life in the various settings in the life of the church. Western and Eastern traditions of monastic life developed their own styles of life. However, these should be recognised as being formed by and belonging to the same tradition, and showing how it can adapt to specific social and ecclesiastical conditions. In the modern world, this monastic way of life continues to bring renewal to the church in the 'new monasticism' which adapts traditional monastic practices to contemporary life. New monastic communities engage in evangelism, serve and identify with the marginalised, offer hospitality, and commit themselves to follow rules of life and prayer. Their radical forms of discipleship and obedience to the gospel place them clearly within the continuing monastic tradition.

Keywords: monk; asceticism-monastic life; community-desert; celibacy; fasting; common life; spirituality

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1. New and Old Monasticism

The phrase 'new monasticism' has entered into theological vocabulary during the last fifty years. It covers a wide range of communities, practices, writings and movements which all recognize that they belong in some way to the tradition of monasticism. New forms of community life are found in all parts of the church. These new communities not only challenge and critique of modern secular culture, but also live out a renewed vision of the Christian gospel. They also enable a fresh assessment of monasticism, seeing it as rooted in the call of the gospel and lived out in different ways and settings. Here, we will consider, first, the beginnings of the monastic movement; then, the various different ways it developed; and finally how 'new monasticism' has taken shape within it (Christie and Flanagan 2020).

2. The Fourth Century

The distinction of being the first monk goes to an Egyptian called Isaac. The texts state that he was travelling along a road near the village of Karanis in north Egypt with a deacon called Antoninus in the year 324 when they met a fellow-traveller called Aurelius who was being attacked by robbers. They helped and cared for him. This event is reported in a contemporary chronicle and the use of this suggests that Isaac, as a monk, had a recognised place in the church, alongside priests and deacons (Judge 1977).

The word monk or *monachos* is derived from the Greek *monos*, which has various shades of meaning to do with singleness—alone, forsaken, unique, bereft or solitary. It has been used, from the 4th century, to describe those who chose to dedicate themselves in a single-minded way to a life of prayer.

At the time when Isaac carried out his act of compassion for the traveller, in 324, the ascetic, Anthony, was attracting visitors and followers to a mountain in the east of Egypt. He was over 70 years old and he was to live a further 35 years. He had lived an eremitic

form of ascetic life in a tomb near his village for forty years, then had travelled with a group of camel traders into more remote parts of the desert. Here, he had settled at the foot of a mountain called Clysma where he remained until his death at the age of 105. His life was written by Athanasius who described Anthony's influence and writes that he 'persuaded many to take up the solitary life. So from then on there were many monasteries in the mountains and the desert was made into a city by the monks'. (Life of Antony 14). Many of those who followed this way of monastic or solitary living settled in the desert south of Alexandria, where the settlements of Nitria and Cellia became home to ascetics who followed a solitary life of struggle (Chitty 1966).

This way of life could be followed by those living in community as well as those living alone. About the same time, a soldier called Pachomius had been briefly in prison, where he had received the support of local Christians. When he was discharged from the army and was baptised, he determined to follow the faith of those who had cared for him. He settled in Upper Egypt, and he too lived a life of asceticism. Disciples joined him and eventually a network of communities grew up (Life of Pachomius. 1980; Rousseau 1995). Unlike the informal settlements of hermits in the north, Pachomius' communities were large and carefully regulated. They provided a secure if simple way of life for hard-pressed peasants who lived, worked, worshipped and studied together. They became known as *coenobia*, a word derived from the Greek, meaning common life.

There were further examples of ascetic living in other parts of the Christian world. Julian Saba, meaning the Old Man, came from Osrhoene in eastern Syria and was becoming known for his ascetic life. By the time of his death in 367 he was the centre of a community of a hundred followers (Theodoret. 1985). Syria became known for its extreme and unconventional forms of ascetic life. Stylites spent long periods living on the top of pillars, while *boskoi* or grazers led a wandering life living off wild plants. Some ascetic practices were seen as subversive and heretical, and became causes of scandal. These became known as Messalians, or those who prayed. A church council was convened at Gangra some time before 341 which legislated against these socially subversive practices, such as the cases of women who deserted their husbands and dressed in male clothes, and slaves who used their ascetic commitment as an excuse to leave their masters. Messalians were also accused of avoiding regular worship in church, preferring solitary prayer and their own assemblies (Stewart 1991). These various forms of life are a reminder that monastic life, and Christian discipleship, does not conform to the standards and values of secular society, and should always challenge and disturb.

Ascetic communities could be set up in cities as well as in desert. The career of Basil who later became bishop of Caesarea, often known simply as Basil the Great, shows how asceticism could adapt to urban life. Basil was born in 330 and as a young man he studied under philosophers in Constantinople and Athens. He also went to Egypt, Syria and Mesopotamia to visit the ascetics, and these lives made a deep impression on him. When he returned home to Pontus in Asia Minor he settled on his family estate where he lived a secluded philosophical life. Later, when he became bishop of Caesarea in 370, he drew on these mixed influences and founded a set of buildings which were known as the Basileiados, at the edge of the city. This was both a place where the ascetic life could be lived and also where the sick and needy could be cared for. Thus he adapted the ascetic life he had seen in Egypt and Syria so that it became become part of the ministry of the church in his city diocese. Basil preferred the name of *spoudaioi*, or the zealous, rather than monks, for the members of his community, so showing that he considered the monastic life as a normal way of life for those seeking deeper commitment (Binns 2020; Rousseau 1994).

The context for these new movements was a newly acquired freedom for the church. Before he went into battle against his rival Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge, the Emperor Constantine saw a vision of a cross in the heavens with the words 'in this sign conquer' (Eusebius. *Life of Constantine* 1.28). This led to his decision to become Christian and to the adoption of a new official policy of toleration for all religions (Eusebius, *Church History* 10.5; Ehrman 2018, pp. 219–21). This marked the ending of state persecution of the Christian

church and the dawn of an era in which Christianity was to become the faith of the Roman empire. So now martyrdom, in the form of the acceptance of death for the faith, which had been the way of demonstrating true witness, ceased to be part of Christian experience (Binns 2020). In this new state of freedom and toleration, the movement of monasticism took root and grew within the church.

3. Beginnings

This survey of the eastern Mediterranean at the time when the church was changing its position from an embattled and persecuted minority to become the established faith of the empire shows that at this point of the history of the church, the ascetic life was a familiar if demanding form of discipleship. Just as the martyrs had been an example of courage and faith during the persecutions so now it was the ascetics who were becoming the heroes of the faith, impressing believers and attracting visitors. It was a time of change for the church as it emerged from its dark time of persecution and found itself becoming secure and influential. The challenge of martyrdom had been taken away, and those who longed for a radical way to show their faith and love had to find new pathways. These pathways led into the desert. An example of this movement is early Palestinian monk Chariton, who had been imprisoned during a time of persecution, then, on his release, travelled to the Holy City of Jerusalem and settled in a cave which became the centre of a group of monasteries. He exchanged the martyr's prison for the monk's cell (Life of Chariton. 1941).

The roots of asceticism are in the Bible, and were also there in the culture of the time. There were three influences which motivated the early ascetics, which we can refer to as Place, Purpose and Procedure. These all gave a shape and direction to this radical form of discipleship.

The Place for ascetics was the desert. In Greek this was the *eremos topos* or desert place and so those who lived there became known as hermits. In Palestine, city and desert were close. For those who lived in Jerusalem, a short walk over the ridge of the Mount of Olives to the east of the city took them into a wilder and drier terrain. The olive trees and vineyards of a Mediterranean environment and soil type quickly give way to more barren landscape like that of the central Asian steppe which leads to an African true desert as the Dead Sea becomes closer. Suddenly the city had become distant (Binns 1994, pp. 100–2). The desert was a place of contrast to the city. Here, God could be experienced and encountered. It was in the desert that the Israelites found refuge from their slavery in Egypt and the saving presence of God, where they received the commandments on Mount Sinai. It was also the place where alternative forms of faith—in this case the worship of the idol of a golden calf—were challenged and rejected. Successive prophets from Elijah to John the Baptist went to the desert to find and preach a purer faith. Then, Jesus went into the desert at the start of his ministry, an example which successive monks followed. The desert was a physical expression of the call to change and to repent. It was a reminder that the Kingdom of God is not of this world but stands as a judgment against human sin. As the church extended, the nature of the desert changed. In Egypt desert was the dry land which began where the fertile Nile valley ended. In Syria it was the hill tops which overlooked the valleys below. Later in Russia it was the frozen forests of the north. Desert adapted to the geography of the land but remained as the place where the ascetic went to turn away from the city and towards God.

The Purpose of ascetic life was a single-minded turning towards God. Celibacy was just one aspect of this. In the New Testament, some passages teach a lifelong and faithful marriage relationship as ordered by God, but others commend celibacy and continence as a better way. 'Not everyone can accept this teaching but only those to whom it is given, for there are those who are eunuchs from birth, there are those who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are those who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven' (Matt 19.11–12). Passages like this should not be seen as a negative rejection of marriage and sexuality but rather as a positive search for what is most necessary.

The true nature and meaning of celibacy is made clear through the words used in Syria. The word for single—which later became the Syrian equivalent of monk—was *ihidaya*. This is a word with a rich and suggestive set of meanings. It could refer to Christ who is the Only-Begotten Son. Or to the One God, to the first man Adam, to Christ as the second Adam, and then it could extend to those who shared in the life of the only-begotten Christ though baptism. There is a theological and scriptural background to the word *ihidaya*, which came to be used in several ways. It could be singular or unique; it could be single minded and not divided in heart; it could mean single as unmarried or celibate (Brock 1985, pp. 133–39; Peters 2018).

Among the Procedures, or disciplines, of ascetic living was fasting. Fasting is more than an act of self-denial. Eating is essential to life, and feasting is an image which evokes the kingdom of heaven, where food and drink are abundantly—even over-abundantly—provided to thousands of people at the end of the day or at a wedding day, where the inclusion of tax collectors and sinners as guests at the feast define the universality of the gospel message. We should recognise that fasting is a way of eating—rather than not eating. Fasting could be an expression of penitence and so Christians fasted in the season before Easter. It was also a discipline and form of eating which nurtured the soul and spirit. Then, fasting expressed faith and longing for that eschatological banquet of heaven. Fasting rules could also give identity to a community. The Didache, probably written in the late first century, instructs Christians to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays—to distinguish themselves from the 'hypocrites' (here the author means the Jews) who fasted on Mondays and Thursdays (Didache 166). Later, the list of foods to be avoided in fasting seasons and the dates of the fasts were to become closely regulated, especially in the eastern churches.

The New Testament is a call to repent and believe the gospel. The longing for a radical discipleship took shape in a way of life which was located in a specific place, had a clear purpose and objective and a disciplined way of life to achieve this. It was a radical form of discipleship, living out the call to repent, recognising the presence of the kingdom of heaven in our midst, welcoming the promise of new life and building community in which the transformative power of grace would become experienced. It was a whole-hearted living out of the gospel.

4. Varieties

By the end of the fourth century monks were recognised as a distinct group or order within the church. The movement had a name and would develop an identity, a literature, a distinctive way of life and worship, and so find its place in the church (Binns 2002).

Travel was now easier for Christians and so people were able to communicate better. The monks received pilgrims and guests, and the settlements in Egypt, Syria and Palestine became popular visitor attractions. After staying to see and talk with the monks, the visitors took the ideas and practices back to their homes and there they introduced this new way of monasticism. Some visitors recorded their experiences in travel diaries and accounts of their meetings (Lives of the Desert Fathers 1980). So a monastic literary tradition was shaped and shared. It included accounts of the lives of the saints. The first of these, Athanasius' Life of Antony, is more than a biography (Athanasius. 1980). It presents an ideal to be followed which is a new form of martyrdom, and Antony is a full and perfect model human being. A case can be made that this book was the most widely copied and distributed book in the history of Christianity after the Bible, and spread the monastic ideal across the Christian world, including western Europe. It initiated a form of writing known as hagiography. The visitors also valued the sayings or collections of proverbs, sayings and stories, known as Apophthegmata (Sayings of the Desert Fathers 1975).

There were also monastic Rules attributed to founders such as Pachomius and Basil. These Rules were not systematic sets of regulations to govern all aspects of community life but rather were collections of letters, biblical commentary and advice. They were sources for each monastery to set out its own regulations. The monastic regulation was the *typikon*, giving a pattern of worship and making arrangements for practical details such

as the way to choose a superior. The *typikon* of a large monastery was followed by other houses and some, like that of the monastery of Evergetis in Constantinople were widely imitated (Mullett and Kirby 1994; Hatlie 2007). The worship at the monastery of Mar Saba in Palestine for example became a model for others, and the monasteries of Studium and Evergetis in Constantinople looked to its practice as an example of how to recite the psalms. The liturgical style of the Palestinian desert came to be used in Constantinople and then through the wider church, contributing to the formation of Orthodox liturgy.

The monastic movement became integrated into the life of the church. The Council of Chalcedon in 451 enacted nine canons to regulate the monasteries. These stated that monks were to be under the jurisdiction of bishops who were responsible for the foundation and upkeep of monasteries. The growth in the number of monasteries in later centuries made this difficult to enforce. Nevertheless, it set out the principle that monks belonged within the church and were under the direction of the bishop. This connection was strengthened as monks were called on to become bishops. An early monk-bishop was Rabbula, who became bishop of Edessa in 412 and remained until his death in 436. He maintained his ascetic disciplines throughout his episcopate, ands wanted his priests to be as 'similar to the heavenly angels as human nature allowed' (Sterk 2004). The practice of requiring bishops to be celibate and make monastic vows grew. Soon after the end of the controversy over icons in 843 when monastic leaders, and their arguments in favour of the veneration of icons had prevailed, a council at Haghia Sophia in Constantinople decided that all bishops should be celibate. Then, in 1186 another council required all bishops to take monastic vows, a situation which set in place a tradition which has persisted (Binns 2020, pp. 75–77).

Monasticism is a way of life and a form of radical Christian living. It has a title and name, an example set by monastic founders and saints, a literature which led to a theology of Christian living, a structure to guide the setting up of houses and communities. The monasteries became centres of church life. They were at the forefront of mission, houses of scholarship, places of inner prayer and public worship.

Monasticism in the western Catholic part of the church took a different direction from monasticism in the east. This happened as a result of the work of two monks, both called Benedict (Louth 2007, pp. 101–8). Benedict of Nursia (c 480–543) lived as a hermit on Mount Subiaco near Rome. His way of life changed when he was asked by a group of monks to become their leader or abbot, and this led him to follow a community rather than a solitary life. He founded twelve monasteries on the hills of central Italy with a monastery on Monte Cassino as the main house, and showed them how to order their lives in a disciplined and achievable way. He provided clear directions in his Rule which became the founding document of western monasticism. His Rule recognised four kinds of monks. Benedict approved of two of these classes—hermits living a solitary life and monks who were members of communities. However, he warned against the two less structured forms of life—monks following their own discipline in small domestic houses, which he called Sarabaites, and those who travelled with no settled home, which he called *gyrovagi* (Benedict. 1990, p. 1). The Rule of Benedict was used by the other Benedict—Benedict of Aniane (747–821). This Benedict used the Rule in monasteries which he founded and he persuaded the king Louis the Pious to do the same. Church Councils at Aachen in 816 and 817 decreed that all monasteries in the western empire should follow the Rule of Benedict. This led to the development of the monastic tradition in the west when the setting up of new orders, with a clear rule governing liturgical observance, life style, and even the dress, of members became a requirement. New orders continued to be founded, responding to changing social conditions, the needs of the church's mission and the impact of saintly monastic founders. Each order had its own character and structure, its governance and discipline, which marked it out from others. Monasticism in the west had changed from being a broad movement into becoming an institution (Evans 2016).

These different directions within the one tradition between the east and west show how monastic life could develop in various ways. Across the Christian world, monks adapted their lives to fit into the environment and to respond to the needs of the church

and the society in which they found themselves. From the 4th century onwards, the church spread across Syria and Persia, as far east as India and China, south into Nubia and Ethiopia, and north into central Europe and the Balkans, and, after 1000, across Russia. In large cities like Constantinople there were large and well-endowed houses; in rural areas monasteries were agricultural and industrial enterprises offering employment and security to peasants in uncertain times. Some monks explored less inhabited places and found remote and inhospitable places to settle, being drawn to islands, mountains, deserts and forests, often in places where the Christian faith had not yet been preached. Meanwhile others stayed where they were and converted their home into a monastery where family members and others joined to live a devout life. Now, with the name of monk to designate them, a hagiography and literature of the desert to guide them, a place in the church, monasticism was a broad, free but identifiable movement which brought renewal and life.

Within this widely dispersed and flexible approach to ascetic living, the founders of major monasteries had a lasting influence in shaping the monastic tradition, which provided guidance, teaching and leadership for the church. The lives and examples of some of the influential monastic saints show how the tradition developed and gives a summary of the nature of the monastic vocation.

Antony (c 251–356), the Father of Monks, lived as a hermit, with a relationship with God in prayer as the sole purpose and meaning of his life.

Pachomius (c 290–346), formed *coenobia* or communities as places in which this ascetic life could be lived and regulated, and so made the life more accessible and open.

Basil the Great (330–379) affirmed that charity is the motivation of monastic life and so integrated communities into the life of the wider church.

Benedict (c 480–c 560), known as the Father of Western Monasticism, drew up a Rule for a balanced way of life which provided a carefully regulated structure and discipline which became normative for western monasticism.

Athanasius (c 920–1003) established the monastery of the Great Lavra on Mount Athos which was one of several monastic mountains in the Byzantine East and has remained as an international centre of monastic life, liturgy and culture in the Orthodox East.

Sergius of Radonezh (1314–1392) and his followers extended monastic life into the far north of Russia, showing that monastic life always seeks out remote and inhospitable places, and so giving a missional character. Meanwhile Tekla Haymonot (c 1215–c1313) had earlier spread monastic life to the south, across Ethiopia, where the tradition remains strong.

Gregory Palamas (c 1296–1359) taught the practice of hesychasm through the use of the Jesus Prayer which provided a clearly defined and articulated theology of monastic life.

By the time that the Reformation in the west and the Fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks (1453) led to the disruption and closure of many monasteries, the tradition and way of life of monasticism had become established across the Christian world.

5. A New Monasticism

A way of life which developed in the first millennium has shown itself resilient ad led to revival and new forms of life in the modern era. Many new communities have discovered that the monastic tradition has provided resources for discerning their vocation and a place in the life of the church.

Writings and practices from earlier periods can have a surprising freshness and relevance in our own day. This has been vividly shown by the publishing history of an ancient text which has had an unexpected revival in popularity. The Philokalia, meaning love of the beautiful, is an anthology of texts on inner prayer. The collection was made by two monks on Mount Athos, Nicodemus and Macarius, in the course of the 18th century and published in Venice in 1782. It consists of writing by around thirty-six authors who lived between the 4th and 15th centuries, and covers a wide range of ascetical themes. It forms a full and authoritative summary of the insights and teachings of generations of monks (Bingaman and Nassif 2012). Its publication history shows how the vision of

the monastic vocation has been followed through the history of the church and still gives direction and meaning to radical forms of Christian living. Although there was a similar collection issued in Russia which was widely read, the Greek volume aroused little interest when it was published and there were no further editions during the following century. However, there has been an unexpected revival of enthusiasm for this extensive anthology. This is shown in a rush of new translations—into modern Greek in 1957, into Romanian with a series of volumes from 1946 until 1991, and English from 1979 to 1995, and also into other languages. The success of these editions led the English translator, Kallistos Ware, to comment that 'it is surely astonishing that a collection of spiritual texts originally intended for Greeks living under Ottoman rule should have achieved its main impact two centuries later in the secularised and post-Christian west' (Ware 2012, p. 34). He called it a spiritual time bomb. This publishing phenomenon is one sign of the continuing importance of the monastic tradition for the church.

This renewed interest in medieval monastic literature shows that the ideas and practices of monasticism still can inspire and influence in modern society. A part of the Reformation movement in western Europe had been a reaction against the western from of monasticism. In England, a swift and complete closure of monasteries and priories took place in five years between 1536 and 1541. Other expressions of a radical discipleship took the place of monastic ideals but in the last century monastic ideals have been rediscovered by various parts of the church (Teasdale 2002; Okholm 2007).

Among those who looked to the monks for guidance was the German Lutheran theologian and pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed by the Nazis at the age of 39 in 1945. He wrote in 1935 that 'the restoration of the church will surely come only from a new type of monasticism which has nothing in common with the old but a complete lack of compromise in a life lived in accordance with the Sermon on the Mount in the discipleship of Christ. It is high time that people banded together to do this' (Bonhoeffer [1939] 1954; Peters 2013). These words showed how the tradition of monasticism has passed on a style of Christian living which has retained faithfulness to the gospel message. His words have been discussed and reflected on by others and have encouraged the emergence of a 'new monasticism'.

Jonathan R. Wilson was a Baptist theologian teaching in Vancouver in Canada who developed the idea of a new monasticism in several editions of an essay which he called Faithful Living in a Fragmented World (Wilson 2010). He diagnosed the state of contemporary society as fragmented, since the medieval vision of a universal church and the Enlightenment optimism of a rational civilisation have both been lost in a post-modern and post-Christian society. He developed the suggestions of Bonhoeffer and others to offer the hope for Christian communities which would live out the gospel message in a faithful and integrated way, rooted in the tradition of faith and so be a witness and transforming power of the Christian faith.

His ideas were the subject of a meeting held in 2003 when members of several communities met together to share their experiences and ideals. Out of this meeting came a declaration of twelve principles of a new monasticism which could be the basis of a new form of common life (Rutba 2005).

These are:

1. Relocation to the "abandoned places of Empire" [at the margins of society, usually in depressed, urban areas]
2. Sharing economic resources with fellow community members and the needy among us
3. Hospitality to the stranger
4. Lament for racial divisions within the church and our communities combined with the active pursuit of a just reconciliation
5. Humble submission to Christ's body, the Church
6. Intentional formation in the way of Christ and the rule of the community along the lines of the old novitiate

7. Nurturing common life among members of an intentional community
8. Support for celibate singles alongside monogamous married couples and their children
9. Geographical proximity to community members who share a common rule of life
10. Care for the plot of God's earth given to us along with support of our local economies
11. Peacemaking in the midst of violence and conflict resolution within communities along the lines of Matthew 18
12. Commitment to a disciplined, contemplative life

These twelve principles show how the practices of the early monks, and the rules of later orders, have been developed into guidance for new forms of monastic life. They are faithful to the roots in the ascetic lives of the early monks, recognise that they belong within the continuing monastic tradition but respond to the needs and preoccupations of contemporary society.

So there is still a desert but it is to be found on the margins and among the dispossessed, which are spoken here as 'the abandoned places of Empire'. Deserts are places where the security and prosperity of modern society has broken down, and where life is insecure and fragile. There is still a value given to celibacy which has again become an expression of a single-minded life directed towards God. Those who choose to live a celibate life are valued and supported, but a married relationship can have that same quality of single-mindedness. Then, fasting has been given a wider meaning. It is expressed within a wider spiritual discipline. New monastics often describe their life as intentional to show how their discipline and contemplation guide the life of the community.

While new monastics find how to affirm traditional monasticism, they also place it firmly in modern society. So the twelve principles speak of a concern for the care of the natural world and awareness of the environmental crisis; the witness to reconciliation in places of conflict; the call for justice and dignity for all people of different races; and a sharing of goods in a unequal society divided by wealth and exploitation.

The new monastic movement has become a movement of renewal and mission in the church which has had a wide influence. Communities which see themselves as part of this movement show the creativity and adaptability of the monastic tradition which has come to be lived out in varied settings today, as it was in the 4th century (Cray et al. 2010). These communities are not restricted to those living together but include visitors and those who live apart but follow the same style of faith. So numbers who live within the community fluctuate and their influence is widely dispersed.

Jonathan Wilson's daughter Leah married another Jonathon, and together the Wilson-Hartgroves founded the Rutba community house in North Carolina—named after a town in Iraq where members of their Christian Peacemaker Team had received medical care after a car accident (Wilson-Hartgrove 2005). Like Pachomius before them, they were struck by this example of care and set up Rutba House to be a place of hospitality where all would be welcomed. This rule of hospitality and welcome led to the meeting which formulated the 12 principles of the new monasticism.

Communities have become centres of faith, welcoming visitors in pilgrimage and being a place for meeting and engagement. The community at Taizé traces its beginnings to 1940 when a Frenchman Roger Schütz, at the age of 25 and recently recovered from tuberculosis, bought a cottage in the village where he welcomed and sheltered refugees fleeing the violence of the Second World War. He continued this work with the help of his sister Genevieve both at Taizé and, for a while at Geneva, and then others came to join him. In 1949 Brother Roger and six others made lifelong vows, and in 1953 Brother Roger wrote the Taizé Rule. Since then the community, with brothers from various churches and countries, has provided a welcome to all who came and developed a distinctive style of worship based around repetitive and meditative chants. It receives many visitors and its influence has spread throughout the world. Brother Roger himself was stabbed and killed during evening worship by a mentally ill visitor in 2005 but the community has continued its ministry and growth. Later, a monastery was founded at Bose in northern Italy on

the last day of the Second Vatican Council in December 1965 by Enzo Bianchi, which included members of various evangelical churches within the community. The presence of non-Catholics is a reason for concern within the Vatican which led to the suspension of all services between 1967 and 1968, and a continuing uneasy relationship with the church authorities. This tension shows the creativity and radicality of monasticism which can challenge church as well as secular society (Palmisano 2016).

The Northumbria Community in the UK was set up by a Baptist minister, Roy Searle, and Scottish episcopalian, John Skinner. It grew gradually through the 1980s and was established in 1989. After several moves it is now based in Northumberland at Nether Springs Farm, near to the island of Lindisfarne. Here, the monk and bishop Cuthbert (634–687) had lived and the island was a centre of Celtic spirituality with its monastic, pilgrimage traditions. Its members describe themselves as a dispersed community, and encourage each other to share in a rule built around the principles of availability and vulnerability, and to pray using Celtic forms of worship and spirituality.

A modern form of urban desert was discovered and inhabited by the Simple Way community. In 1995 several homeless families had moved into an empty building owned by the Catholic Church in Kensington North Philadelphia. When they were threatened with eviction, a group of students led by Shane Claiborne moved in with them, and what had started as a two-day protest against the threatened eviction by the church authorities developed into a settlement which continued for three years. Then, in 1997, members of the community bought a disused shoe repair shop and continued their shared community life. They drew inspiration from several sources, some visited Mother Teresa in Calcutta and lived in a leper colony. Simple Way grew from one to six houses, and has set up several projects in their deprived neighbourhood, growing vegetables, distributing food, setting up new jobs and businesses. Another example of seeking out a contemporary desert is the Monastery wing of form of desert is a wing of Kumla high security prison in Sweden, set up by a Jesuit priest and Lutheran pastor, where prisoners can go to work through the Ignatian spiritual exercises as a way of addressing their underlying personal issues (Sizoo 2004, 2010).

The new monasticism has also become a support to mission. Since monks have sought inhospitable and desert places, there was a spiritual dynamic which drove them to new places and unfamiliar—even hostile cultures. So in settings as diverse as medieval Ethiopia or 19th century Asia, monks often preceded the armies of the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia or imperial Russia to form places where the Christian life was practised and taught. It has been commented that as Christian kingdoms set out to conquer new places, armies set up government but monasteries brought civilisation. The longing of monks to bring the gospel to places or cultures where it is not known has led evangelicals to find resources and models for mission from within the monastic tradition. In the city of Sheffield in the UK, the combined Anglican and Baptist congregations of St Thomas Church at Crookes decided on a new mission initiative. They rented a space in the centre of the city and began a new place and form of worship which run simultaneously with worship at their parish church. This was part of a wider movement of mission and evangelism which led to them setting up the Order of Mission in April 2003. It developed a rule based on the principles of Purity, Accountability and Simplicity. Within three years the Order had over 200 members and has groups in many parts of the world. So it has become an international missionary order within this new Monasticism.

These stories come from different countries, different church traditions and have their own charisms and gifts. Each shows how the tradition of the monks can be expressed and lived in fresh and contemporary ways. Like the ascetic communities of the peace of the church in the 4th century, they bring a life formed by a radical discipleship which is lived out in the time and place to which they are called.

6. Conclusions

The monastic journey of the first monk Antony began when, as a young man of 18, he heard the gospel read one Sunday in church with the instruction 'if you would be perfect, sell what you possess and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven'. He went home and sold his family lands and possessions. So his life as a monk began when he listened to the word of God in scripture with its call to perfection and then responded with whole hearted generosity.

The rich tradition of monasticism was created by the single-minded discipleship, the willingness to listen to the call to discipleship and the creative response to the needs of the society of the time. Monasticism has therefore been both old, in being faithful to ancient traditions, and new, in engaging with the challenges of the age. The long story of monastic living, while rooted in the gospel message, is a series of fresh initiatives and renewed revivals.

New monastics belong within this tradition. They draw on the resources of those who have gone before them while challenging fixed ideas and being ready to embrace unexpected and risky ways of life.

Like Antony and like countless others they seek to hear the message of the gospel and to respond, single-mindedly and whole-heartedly, to the abundant promise of life and the call to a radical discipleship.

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Article

Remnant and the New Dark Age

Edward Rommen

Duke Divinity School, Duke University, Durham, NC 27708, USA; erommen@duke.edu or erommen@mac.com

Abstract: A new dark age has come upon us; as a result, Christianity and its churches in North America are no longer growing. One reason for this might be the widespread impression that Christians are hypocrites, saying they believe one thing while doing the opposite. However, that accusation would only be true if these believers actually believed the principles they are supposed to be violating. It is more likely that many Christians have, like those around them, abandoned truth in favor of personal opinion bringing moral discourse to a near standstill and intensifying the darkness by extinguishing the light of truth. Still, there is hope. In the past, it often was a faithful few, a remnant, who preserved the knowledge of that light and facilitated a new dawn. History shows us that the very movements that are today abdicating responsibility were once spiritual survivors themselves. They withdrew, coalesced around the remaining spark of truth in order to remember, preserve, and reignite. The thoughts and practices of these pioneers could guide the escape from today's darkness.

Keywords: moral discourse; contemporary North American Christianity; remnant

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1. Introduction

This article explores the nature, causes, and possible resolution of the profound intellectual and spiritual darkness that has descended on Christian churches in North America. The term "Churches"[1] in this case refers to the Evangelical and the Orthodox traditions, both of which play a direct role in the author's experience, both of which are the intended recipients of the study's conclusions and suggestions. However, today, these terms (Evangelical, Orthodox) are being used with such a wide range of meanings and applied to so many different actors that it has become difficult to know who the actual subjects of analysis are and who the intended readers might be. Therefore, before looking at the darkness itself, some attempt at defining these terms is in order.

The only way to effectively use these terms in the limited context of this essay is for the author to clearly articulate his use of some generally accepted lexical meaning and carefully indicate when there are deviations from that standard. Moreover, the author is asking the readers, no matter their own opinions, to understand and accept that the meanings derived from those standards are the meanings ascribed to these terms as they are used in this text. Absent such agreement, no reasonable dialog can take place since the readers would be free to read other meanings into the text leaving the author's statements open to misinterpretation and, perhaps, rendering them completely incomprehensible. In a very general way, what is being asked for here is similar to adherence to a correspondence theory of truth, according to which a statement, or in this case a term, has to possess direct correlation to some real state of affairs (it is either raining or it is not) or, in the case of a word, conformity to some generally accepted lexical standard such as a dictionary (the musical note A has a frequency of 440 Hz[2]; in an ordinary dialog, this, not something determined by individual opinion, is the meaning of the note A).

As defined here, the term "Eastern Orthodox" is relatively straightforward and stable. It has usually defined in terms of commitment to the affirmations of the Creeds and the doctrinal affirmations of the early Church the authority of the Scriptures and, to a lesser extent, certain rites and practices. To be Orthodox is to ascribe to and participate in the

dynamic flow of history that includes the initial deposit of Christ as it passes over into the reality of human life, first to the Apostles, then through them from generation to generation. This allows for relatively stable lexical content and an identity that is clearly rooted in doctrine, specific practices, commandments and moral precepts, and structures (hierarchy, Ecumenical Patriarch). In that sense, who can rightly call themselves Orthodox? Only someone who was baptized in the Orthodox Church according to its canons, affirms the Creed, and participates in the sacramental life of the Church[3].

Defining the term "Evangelical" is a bit more challenging since the lexical content seems to be a bit more fluid. During my youth (ca. 1950–1975), I was an active member of a group that, in no uncertain terms, understood itself to be Evangelical. That identity was in large part rooted in its Scandinavian Free Church heritage as well as Continental European (German) pietism that preceded it. This legacy was an active and vital part of my fellow Evangelicals' self-awareness and did, in fact, help create a sense of Evangelical identity and belonging[4]. However, that identity was also shaped by a shared commitment to a very specific set of doctrines, doctrines that had been articulated, fought for, and died for, and that within very specific and definable historical contexts. Growing up, it seemed impossible to separate what we believed from the people, events, and circumstances that brought us to those convictions. I was clearly a descendant of Scandinavian Free Church pietists who tenaciously ascribed to a very clearly defined set of beliefs, in particular, to an unwavering commitment to the authority of the Scriptures.

However, the way that identity was defined began to change in the late 1970s as the ethno-/historical commitments and ties began to fade. By the time I was teaching at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in the 1980s, identifying myself as an Evangelical in those circles had almost nothing to do with my historical (Scandinavian) heritage and more to do with what I believed about biblical authority, the necessity of witness, the importance of keeping Christ's commandments. In other words, as consciousness of a shared history diminished and disappeared, Evangelical identity increasingly became a matter of a shared theology. The common history was, of course, not erased from memory, but it was no longer a primary factor in the self-understanding of (these particular) Evangelical believers.

That should have given us a clear and stable standard for defining ourselves. Believe these things and you are an Evangelical. Unfortunately, that transition from an identity rooted in common ecclesio-theological history to one generated almost exclusively by our doctrinal commitments did not go as smoothly as expected because the assumed theological consensus and the unity of behavior that might have been expected never materialized. As a result, it became increasingly difficult to say exactly what it meant to be an Evangelical. By the mid-1980s, theological diversity became so pronounced within the Evangelical community that, according to Carl F. H. Henry, the "'evangelicals' sense of their own identity and purpose, as well as their public image, [had] never been more murky and maligned" (Affirmations: What Does It Mean to Be Evangelical? 1989, p. 16). So concerned were Henry and other "Christian leaders [that they] convened at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, to try to hammer out a concise definition of evangelical belief and practice" (Affirmations: What Does It Mean to Be Evangelical? 1989). The conference participants produced an 1800-word statement detailing nine theological positions to which all Evangelicals would agree. The document concluded with a three-fold definition according to which an Evangelical believes, first of all, the gospel as it is set forth in the Bible; second, holds to all of the most basic doctrines that emerge from the Bible and are summarized in the Apostles' Creed and the historic confessions of evangelical churches; and third, believes the Bible to be the final and authoritative source of all doctrine (Kantzer and Henry 1990, p. 5). Therefore, it was this commitment to that specific set of values that was to define these individuals as Evangelical and not the many different historical streams, institutions, and denominations that they represented (Labberton 2018, p. 16).

It seems then that we do have a generally accepted lexical content that allows us to define the terms "Evangelical" (affirmations) and "Orthodox" (Creed, Tradition). Indeed,

these standards are still widely used. For example, as recently as in 2017, the LifeWay Research Evangelical Beliefs project was able to categorize respondents to their surveys as Evangelical if they agreed with four statements: (1) the Bible is the highest authority for what I believe; (2) it is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior; (3) Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin; (4) only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation (see Smietana 2017). These agreed-upon definitions have enabled us to use the terms with a high degree of mutual understanding in an ordinary dialog, that is, until recently when two things have conspired to change the situation.

First, within both of these faith traditions (Evangelical, Orthodox), there is now an increasing number of individuals, publications, and institutions that have begun to modify or alter the standards used to define these communities. These redefinitions range from altering or abandoning specific positions (on homosexuality), reinterpreting particular passages of Scripture (on materialism, divorce, etc.), all the while still claiming a commitment to its authority, taking a revisionist view of their own historical legacy, and, in a few cases, abandoning the defining framework (history and doctrine) altogether. While changes of this nature can be expected as the general drift of society puts pressure on the Christian community, what makes this challenging now is that one and the very same term (Orthodox, Evangelical) continues to be used even in the absence of any correspondence to an agreed upon standard. Of course, there are some who are honest enough to drop the label and leave those communities when they are no longer able to ascribe to the established definitions. David Gushee, for example, writes that there is now a "surging population of evangelical exiles," (Gushee 2020, p. 9) "post-evangelicals or ex-evangelicals or #exvangelicals or somewhere painfully in between. I am one of them" (Gushee 2020, p. 1). Given the number of young people leaving the Orthodox Church (Danckaert 2014), the same thing could be said about them.

Nevertheless, there are many others who still self-identify as Orthodox or as Evangelical, and that with a much-diminished adherence to the historical legacies or theological affirmations that once characterized these groups. This can be seen in recent polling which shows that many who still call themselves Evangelical now embrace lifestyles every bit as hedonistic, materialistic, self-centered, and sexually immoral as the general population. Divorce is more common among "born-again" Christians than in the general American population. Only six percent of the Evangelicals tithe. Forty-seven percent of the self-identifying Orthodox think that aiding the poor "does more harm than good" (Orthodox Christians—Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics and Statistics 2020). White Evangelicals are the "*most* likely people to object to neighbors of another race, and the sexual promiscuity of evangelical youth is only a little less outrageous than that of their non-evangelical peers" (Sider 2005, p. 12). The same kind of lexical discontinuity can be seen among the Orthodox. Sixty two percent of the Orthodox think that homosexuality "should be accepted" (Orthodox Christians—Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics and Statistics 2020). They express this opinion and identify as Orthodox, all the while being members of a Church that has consistently considered the practice incompatible with Scripture.

Presumably, this is happening because these individuals assume it is their right to reinterpret, modify, replace, or even annul those standards. They might have come to believe that they, individually, "know or feel" what a particular passage of Scripture might mean and how it should be applied to any given situation. What if they thought that they themselves and not the Church, Tradition, or Scripture had absolute sovereignty over the moral decisions they make and the behavior they engage in? There does seem to be some evidence of this kind of thing happening. How often are phrases like "to me, this bible text means . . . ", "I feel that this is . . . ", or "let me tell you my truth" heard today! If this is indeed happening, then it is the individual who is determining what truth is, and the repository of actual truths contained in the Scripture, Tradition, and

the very words of Christ is being replaced by the individual's own words. Presumably, this would create complete agreement between the behavior and the desires, opinions, feelings, interpretations with which they have replaced Christ's teachings. In that case, they would not be following, or even claiming to follow, Christ's word, but rather their own. That would explain why these individuals would "not feel any sense of internal conflict when it comes to Jesus and their own behavior." They are, after all, doing exactly what they want to do or feel they need to do. Kristin Kobes Du Mez, after a lengthy study of what she calls conservative Christians[5] (Du Mez 2020), observed no internal conflict, "no angst or no sense that [their behavior] was somehow a difficult trade-off" (Illing 2020). Speaking of these conservative believers, Kobes Du Mez notes, for example, that they " . . . are not acting against their deeply held values when they elect [corrupt politicians], they're affirming [their own feelings]" (Illing 2020), which means that they are free to continue self-identifying as, in this case, Evangelical. Obviously, this discrepancy between the standard definitions (affirmations, Creed, Traditions) and the beliefs and behaviors of these self-declared Orthodox and Evangelicals makes consistent and understandable use of these terms increasingly difficult if not impossible.

The second factor that has changed the situation comes from outside these faith communities. Here, I am speaking about the way in which these terms (Orthodox, Evangelical) are being used in public discourse or common parlance. This usage is largely driven by the mass media—major news outlets, social medial, print media—and it appears to be based on widely available lexical content and the resulting expectations. To get an idea of what these expectations might be, you simply have to look the terms up in a contemporary dictionary[6]. Somehow, because of their own study (dictionaries, literature, documentaries, etc.) or because of the claims and behavior of the believers themselves, these observers develop a mental image of Evangelicals and the Orthodox that at least initially approximate the lexical standards mentioned above. They then use that internal template to filter and inform their observations and, in some cases, condemnation of both Evangelical and Orthodox believers. This can be illustrated by the secular contractor who, after witnessing obvious misbehavior by Orthodox monastics, spontaneously said, "they are not acting like Christians." The contractor's understanding of Christianity may not be accurate, but he does have a preconceived mental image, an expectation, and he is using it. Similarly, reporters observe self-proclaimed Evangelicals aligning themselves with political positions and activities and proceed to evaluate them according to their own expectations of things Evangelical. They wonder how the Evangelicals' unrestrained embrace[7] of right-wing political candidates, issues, and conspiracies[8] can be squared with their perceived claim to follow Christ. How can they "bestow a lopsided 75% to 80% majority of their political support upon . . . a man constantly demonstrating his total lack of human decency through his cruel social policies, sleazy personal behavior, ceaseless torrent of lies and vicious, hate-filled slurs spewed at anyone who refuses to bow down before him" (McNally 2019). Other observers wonder in what sense these individuals can be seen as keeping Christ's commandments when the members of a packed Evangelical megachurch respond to a politician's announcement that one of our enemies had been "terminated" with "roaring applause . . . " holding hands, praying, singing songs praising God while they "chant 'USA' and 'four more years....'" (Payne 2020). To many observers, the discrepancy between Jesus' teaching on non-violence and these self-identified followers of Christ is simply astounding and hence the charge of hypocrisy. "To celebrate an assassination in a church is not only a distortion of the Christian message [as imagined by the reporters], but it is also a gross example of moral hypocrisy and massive self-deception" (Payne 2020).

However, as these reports proliferate, the terms (in particular, Evangelical) are gradually changed, reshaped in the image of the reporters' observations, expectations, and disappointments to the point where, as those words are now being used publicly in the United States, they no longer correspond to the abovementioned set of theological affirmations and are almost always used negatively. "Christians have [it seems] developed a reputation for saying one thing and doing another" (Bradley 2016). Associating them with

hypocrisy[9] has become a default position of sorts such that "Many folks don't perceive Christian individuals, churches, institutions, and organizations in the United States as being loving, patient, or kind—and with good reason. Instead, Christians are often viewed as being the exact opposite: envious, boastful, arrogant, and rude" (Matton 2019).

At the same time, even as the meanings are evolving, these terms (Evangelical, Orthodox) are still being used in public discourse as if we all agreed on what they mean. However, when speaking of Evangelical and Orthodox Christians, are we referring to individuals defined by the ancient creeds, Scripture, shared doctrinal affirmations, or a common historical legacy? Are they simply ritualists mindlessly performing certain rites, preserving a particular language or culture, doing church, all the while being divorced from the theology and Tradition that once defined them? Are they, on the other hand, fanatics, right-wing, seditionists (6 January 2021) referred to by the national media as Evangelicals (and, indeed, there were plenty of bibles, crosses, pastors present that day for the whole nation to see, bolstering identification)? When claiming that some Orthodox and Evangelicals no longer believe in or reflect the basic principles of the faith (as is indeed evidenced by recent polling), are we referring to the same individuals defined in the media as Evangelicals? As many Orthodox become nominal, are characterized by an appalling lack of biblical knowledge, and are gradually shifting allegiances and commitments, are we still to call them Orthodox? Obviously, this muddled state of lexical content, this definitional uncertainty makes writing an essay like this or for that matter just discussing the religious landscape quite challenging. At the same time, one has to wonder why this is happening and whether these shifting definitions and allegiances are indicative of, the result of, or even an expression of the Darkness now descending on us.

2. The Descending Darkness

This societal darkness into which North American Christianity is being absorbed is the result of the disproportionate influence of extreme inwardness (Taylor 1989, p. 211) fostered by radical individualism which assumes the human ability to define the good by referencing only itself. This turn inward has effectively prevented individuals from appealing to any kind of meta-narrative when seeking to legitimize the rightness of their own beliefs and everyday behavior. All "moral judgments, as they [have] now come to be understood, [are] *essentially contestable*, expressive of the attitudes and feelings of those who uttered them" (MacIntyre 2007, Loc. 57). For that reason, moral discourse has become impossible as "our society [now] has no established way of deciding between these claims" (MacIntyre 2007, p. 7). In the absence of external, impersonal standards, there are no facts, no arguments, just personal opinions. We have moved beyond the relevancy of any objective truth into what the Oxford Dictionary describes as the realm of post-truth, an intellectual space "in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Oxford Languages 2016). It is not that the concept of truth has been entirely lost. It is just that truth has little bearing or no bearing on the conclusions drawn and behaviors rooted in those conclusions. Recently, a well-known public figure made a statement that was obviously false; a reporter asked one of this person's colleagues, "Can you provide any evidence to back up that statement?" In answer, the colleague said, "Well, look, I think he's expressed his opinion on that. And he's entitled to express his opinion on that." To which the startled reporter asked, "... whether it's true or not?" (Wang 2016).

If everything, including what is true, rests on individual opinion, then "moral argument appears to be necessarily *interminable*" (MacIntyre 2007, p. 8). Discourse is reduced to my word against yours, my opinion against yours, my truth against your truth, in a perpetual exchange that can never be resolved into rationally justifiable action. We could, of course, as many do, simply disengage and withdraw into the isolation of our respective opinion bubbles, thus avoiding exposure to anything not already agreed with (Sunstein 2017). In that case, there is little need for expertise, general knowledge, education, literacy, or history since everything that is needed is found within the sphere of

one's own personal opinion. No longer valued, literacy, education (Berman 2000), and civility (Brooks 2015) will gradually fade from collective consciousness while intentional ignorance, arrogance, and superstition will rapidly intensify (Hunt 2001). Even if one chooses to engage, they will inevitably be trapped in an endless debate-sans-truth which, bereft of coherent counterpoint, will resort to attacks ad hominin, become increasingly violent, and will end in an angry, morally divided gridlock—collective moral paralysis without remedy. As our "civilization tips over into decline, the contents of its educational and cultural institutions, its arts, literature, sciences, philosophies, and religions . . . " (Greer 2016, p. 10) are being irrevocably forgotten. Even conservative Christians are themselves being irresistibly dragged down into the dark abyss where the light of faith, biblical literacy, decent discourse, self-transcendence, and kenotic love are being actively and knowingly disremembered.

Christianity in North America is caught up in the process of losing its moral treasures to a self-induced mass amnesia—forgetting decorum, neglecting biblical teaching, disregarding Tradition. As literacy, education, civility, and basic knowledge fade, the basic resources needed to proceed with new moral enquiries or to recover from the damage already sustained are also being lost. We are, as Jane Jacobs has warned, "rushing headlong into a Dark Age" (Jacobs 2007, Loc. 61). There are, of course, many today who shy away from the designation "Dark Ages" because it is said to be a misleading generalization that all too often implies "a time of death, ignorance, stasis, and low quality of life" (Reinhardt 2013, p. 1). Nevertheless, since "our society's analytical elements are in jeopardy" (Hunt 2001, p. 8), as was the case in Western Europe after the fall of Rome, "we cannot ignore the parallels between the Dark Ages and our own time" (Hunt 2001, p. 8).

If the darkness descending generally on our society were not upsetting enough, the failings of Christians have only deepened the distress. By replacing the divine repository of precepts with the vicissitudes and vagaries of individual choice, these believers have all but eliminated the possibility of reliable moral discrimination both in churches and by Christians. If believers who lay claim to the light of Christ's standard for making moral decisions are in reality governed only by the dimness of their own imaginings, then with what insight can they possibly illumine the moral darkness of a declining society? If the light born by the very children of light (Eph. 5.8) is extinguished by moral bankruptcy, then what hope is left? With no moral *résistance* whatsoever, these could-be-luminaries are instead willingly absorbed into the morally self-defining mass of lemmings rushing over the proverbial cliff to join the pervading blackness of an abyss. Is this not being condemned to the state of affairs described by Isaiah? "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (5:20). Does this not mean facing the ultimate darkness spoken of by Jesus when He said the "light of the body [society] is the eye [believers]," but if the eye turns evil, "the whole body shall be full of darkness?" Therefore, if the light turns to darkness, then "how great is that darkness!" (Mt 6:21–23).

Our hearts are heavy, broken by what appears to be a wholesale loss of the values, knowledge, and practices that once defined diverse and vibrant groups and movements of Christians. We are afraid and justifiably speak of the darkness even of those believers who are now harshly judged and effectively silenced by their own collusion with prevailing moral dissolution. We quite naturally ask, "Who can help us find a way forward?" Can one expect to find any hope in such darkness, among the spiritually dead?

3. A New Remnant

Looking back over history, one discovers remarkable echoes of hope-in-darkness that often followed a similar path of recovery, a roadmap to reillumination: regrouping, remembering, reigniting. During times of danger and darkness, believers faithful to Christ have repeatedly responded to descending darkness by coalescing into small groups in order to preserve and nurture the remaining spark of light, faint though it may have been. Across many places, times, and institutions, the remaining faithful have explored various forms of

remnant-living—residual communities and individuals who withdrew without leaving, who lived apart but not in isolation, who were separated and yet remained integrated.

The desert ascetics gave the early believers hope by choosing the "death" of withdrawing from ordinary life as effective means of preserving spiritual life in the face of the darkness of an era plagued by political, financial, and military upheaval as well as the already atrophying institutional Church (Chitty 1995). New ways of preserving that hope evolved and gave rise to a myriad of cenobitic (brick and mortar) communities which spread to Central Europe and which, at least in some cases, represented a deliberate response to the crisis of the Medieval Dark Ages (Berman 2000). That very same spirit of renunciation was expressed differently in the extremely mobile monastic communities that leap-frogged their way across the vast landscape of Eastern Russia and on to the shores of Alaska, proclaiming the Gospel and defending those oppressed by the evils of unbridled greed and materialism (Oleksa 2010). This same ascetic impulse has been repeatedly expressed in the post-Reformation Protestant West. In response to a crisis of a spiritually dead Lutheran orthodoxy (beginning at the end of the 16th century) and the spiritual, physical, and material exhaustion caused by 30 years of religious warfare (1618 to 1648), small but determined groups of believers "withdrew" and formed the very loosely defined Pietist Movement, some of which even lived in semi-monastic assemblies (Ackva et al. 1995).

Those sentiments were given more concrete form in response to the crisis of faith caused by the developing Enlightenment as can be seen in the communal, monastery-like living arrangements established by the Moravians and the influence they had on early Methodism in England. More recent examples include the *Marburger Bruderschaft* (Zimmermann 2011) as well as the *Gemeinshafts Bewegung* which was a movement of Lutheran believers who sought an intensity of spiritual life that could not be found in the increasingly secular Lutheran Church. They were given permission by the Church to establish their own institutions (places of worship (prayer houses), mission agencies, publishing houses, semi-monastic organizations called *Bruder-* or *Schwesterschaften* and even one dedicated to missionary outreach, the *Liebenzeller Mission*) (Staunen über mehr als 120 Jahre 2020). Similar movements developed in Scandinavia. Under the leadership of Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771–1824) (Hauge 1804), believers responded to the spiritual lifelessness of the state Church by renouncing without abandoning it and withdrawing into specialized communities called *Bedehuset* (prayer houses). In the late 1800s, another Scandinavian movement led by Frederik Franson (Torjesen 1991) had a direct hand in establishing and populating both the Evangelical Free Church of America (Olson 1964) and the Covenant Church of America. Still, another example can be seen in the withdrawal of the "Confessing Christians" (Stoevesandt 1961; Hornig 1977) during the crises of the world wars. These were Lutherans desiring to stand against those in the Church who were collaborating with the Nazis and corrupting Christian teaching and practice. They "withdrew" as a protesting remnant into isolated retreat centers in order to focus on the spiritual life under the leadership of the movement's most famous representative, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. This interest in light-preserving ascetic retreat continues into our own day among Baptist communities in Australia (Dekar 2008), the Lutheran Evangelical Sisters of Mary (Evangelische Marienschwesternschaft 2020) led by Basilea Schlink, the Catholic Society of St. Pius X (Green 2020), and is evidenced in a number of recent publications (Dreher 2017).

Groups and individuals like those mentioned above sought to express the fundamental principle of a strategic retreat and have, without a doubt, played a role in the historical development of Orthodoxy, Protestantism, and what is called, or at least until recently has been understood to be, Evangelicalism. In what are potentially instructive ways, individuals in these streams of history have explored or experimented with their own expressions of this ideal and have developed insights and practices that have enabled them to recognize and preserve the spark of divine light even in the darkness of their own times. We ourselves are living in a time of darkness; a time of political, economic, social chaos; a time in which many in the Church have enabled, identified, or been coopted by that chaos;

a time of pandemic ravages and the less than helpful reactions to it. Therefore, one wonders, as did MacIntyre (2007), Berman (2006), Dreher (2017), Gushee (2020), Labberton (2018), and a host of others, if one can look to the past for insights that could help shape a response to the contemporary crisis. Are there treasures buried in our Orthodox, Protestant, and Evangelical traditions that, if unearthed now, could help illuminate a way out of the present darkness? What would it look like for us, relying on their examples, to implement an expression of basic ascetic principles today, to seek out and latch on to the spark of divine light still present in the darkness, to regroup as remnants around that light, to remember our biblical and traditional treasures, and to initiate a new twilight, a new dawn?

Seeking the light. To begin with, the history of the groups mentioned above teaches us that the flower of hope, that fruit of divinity, should be sought within the context of existing faith communities[10]. In other words, they teach us that a strategic withdrawal, a movement of resistance, does not necessarily mean further fracturing the Church by creating yet another separate ecclesial entity. No, the lesson, entirely appropriate for our own situation, seems to be that the task of a remnant is not to start something entirely new, but rather to preserve what has already been given. The continual presence of the light, Christ, is facilitated by the Holy Spirit and passed into the assembly of believers at Pentecost. That is where it is to be found. That is where one is to look for it. That is where the survivors mentioned above sought it, within the Church and the churches as they actually exist. However, if hope is to be rediscovered, it will mean penetrating the moral darkness generated at the interface of Christianity's interaction with the secular world. To find light, those seeking it will have to ignore the evil undergrowth of unethical alliances, see past the structures of alternate truth, overlook the presence of self-centered devotion to wealth, and draw courage, knowing that, as instantiated in this world, the Church is a combination of becoming and being, of potential and actual, constantly caught up in the process of change. Thus, understanding that the true properties of Church are generated by its own essence (the person of Christ) and in spite of the sinful limitations of those who interact with it, one may still be able to get a glimpse of, reach out, and touch the flower of light, its primary properties generated at the interface between the transcendent holy personhood of Christ and our own created personhood.

Searching for hope in this place and in this way immediately draws one's attention to the radiance of the Eucharist, that divinely actuated mediation of and communion with the person of Christ. Therein lies hope—–there is the living vine, the flower of hope (the Rose of Sharon, Song of Songs 2:1). However, it is not just the vision of this light, but rather direct contact with the light that allows Christ, who is present in it, to illumine individual experience of the darkness and heal wounds. Therefore, even if all other avenues of personal engagement in the Church may fail to generate hope and seem to simply re-enforce non-Church darkness, one possibility still exists, and in aid of accessing that transcendent hope, this quest must be focused on the holy mysteries as offered during Divine Services by disregarding the many darkness-generating characteristics of ecclesial communities and seeking unmediated participation in the primary transformative power of becoming as it is offered in the Eucharist and applied by Church.

One might counter by saying that the celebration of the liturgy is subject to all the same corrupting influences that have otherwise masked the Church's holiness. Indeed, one might be tempted to think that the sacrament itself is exposed to a hope-limiting degree of vulnerability because it has to be overseen by priests who may or may not be worthy of the sacred task. However, clearly, the efficacy of the sacrament does not depend on the piety or words of the priest but rather on the descent and the operation of the Holy Spirit. True communion is possible even if the celebrant does not embody the essential properties of the Church because the sacrament is accomplished exclusively by God and its efficacy is guaranteed by Him. The act of receiving the holy mysteries may well create the only space in the Church, the only moment in life in which the individual participating in the very life and presence of Christ is actually beyond the reach of evil; it cannot be corrupted.

It is a truly safe haven. It is the best, if not the only, operative point of departure for the individual journey toward restoring hope.

This is, no doubt, one reason why the Eucharist was the unbreakable link to the light even for those who, in the past, had withdrawn into the isolation of the "deserts" (Hall 2006). John the Hermit "took food only on Sunday. For on that day a priest came and offered the Holy Sacrifice for him, and the Sacrament was his only food" (Hall 2006). No matter how much he wandered in the desert, " . . . on Sundays he was always at the same place to receive Communion" (Cain 2016, VIII. 51). Abba Helle came down out of the desert and crossed the Nile in order to receive communion at a village church (Cain 2016, XIII.59). Abba Apollo taught that "he who receives communion frequently, receives the Savior frequently . . . [i]t is therefore useful for monks to keep the remembrance of the Savior's passion in their minds constantly, and to be ready every day, and to prepare themselves in such a way as to be worthy to receive the heavenly Mysteries at any time . . . " (Cain 2016, VIII. 56). Another example is Saint Mary of Egypt who received communion from Zozimas (The Life of our Holy Mother Mary of Egypt 2005). The evangelical "separatists" of the Fellowship Movement, the Confessing Church, and the Prayer House movement, even though they withdrew in the face of ecclesial decline, all insisted on maintaining their formal connection to the Church so that they could continue to receive communion.

4. Gathering the Remnant

Having recognized the flower of divine light, these spiritual survivors of the darkness reach to partake and are strengthened. Doing so is an intentional expression of faithfulness, of the spiritual life that still pulses in their hearts. Moreover, it is an observable sign of spiritual commitment that is recognizably and quantitatively unlike the occasional and perfunctory behavior exhibited by many others in the darkness. That contrast combined with the working of the Holy Spirit will allow these spiritual survivors to recognize fellow survivors, sensing a communion that goes beyond the general unity of action inherent in participation (Rom. 12.5, I Cor. 10.17, 12.13). This is a unity of mind (Rom. 12.16, 15, 15 Phil. 2.15), a fellowship, a having-in-common, which creates a perceptible bond between those who genuinely follow Christ (Eph 3.9 1 John 1.7). This is certainly in keeping with the teaching of Romans 8:16 where St. Paul indicates that it is the Spirit Himself who reveals what is shared with one another.

This phenomenon was observed, for example, by a Norwegian State Church Lutheran priest who noticed that when communion was offered, only a very small number of attendees participated. In talking with his congregants, he discovered that they considered such regular participation to be an overt sign of spiritual commitment that went beyond what was considered normal for members of the church (Standal 1987, pp. 66–68). Therefore, if the secularized unfaithful members were able to discern, at least to some extent, the presence of spiritual life in the faithful, then these survivors were presumably even more likely to have recognized the kindred spirit of their fellow survivors. According to Archimandrite Mitilinaios, there has always been and is today a faithful minority, a remnant in the Church, and they will know each other and will have a clear inner understanding that they belong to the remnant (Mitilinaios 2016). In other words, the survivors taking communion have always and will always be able to recognize each other.

This recognition, of course, does not by itself always lead to an actual coalescing of a remnant into an identifiable group. A remnant will not form solely on the basis of some mystical magnetism shared by its potential participants. As history teaches, the remnant is constituted by means of some human agency, that is, by divinely inspired believers willing to issue a call to repentance, courageously speak the truth, teach, write, and even organize. Consider Elijah complaining to God that he alone had remained faithful. Apparently, he was not aware of the seven thousand faithful that God still had in the land, and it took some additional action in order to activate the remnant (1 Kings 19, pp. 15–21). In this case, the fashioning of a remnant was a direct result of God calling Elijah and equipping

him to challenge his contemporaries in light of the promise of the Messiah (Is. 6, 8:16ff). It should also be noted that the remnant existed by an act of God which displayed the justice of His judgment (8:6; 14:21ff). Its coalescing and survival were the result of divine grace (Mic. 2:12; 4:7; 5:6–7). Today, it will be necessary to, in the traditions of the prophets, find ways to enable God-inspired individuals to formally agitate for the coming-together of the survivors into a functioning remnant.

Here, again, one is able to draw on a rich treasury of past practices to guide us as new groups of survivors are organized, societies within the churches for the purpose of remembering, preserving, and promoting spiritual life. The most common approach has been to gather the survivors by offering them the safe harbor of study groups, fellowships, or societies dedicated to the advancement of the spiritual life, as illustrated by the already alluded to in-church groupings formed by Evangelical believers in Germany and Scandinavia. Once established, these groups drew many like-minded who had already been made one by virtue of the Eucharist into the fellowship of shared study, prayer, and witness. Another example is the contemporary adaptation of the Wesleyan class meeting (Mitilinaios 2016). "Historically, Class Meetings 'made sure that every Methodist was connected to other Methodists, so no one was left out, ignored, or overlooked . . . They relentlessly focused every Methodist on the current state of their relationship with God. And they connected people to others who were at different stages of the Christian life" (Iovino 2015). Today, these groups are started by "simply invit[ing] some friends together and ask[ing] the question, 'How's your spiritual life?' Then see where the Holy Spirit leads." It is, it seems to me, a gathering of the like-minded, the spiritual survivors coalescing around the light of Christ's presence, under the guidance of God-inspired leaders within the existing structures of a Methodist congregation.

The Orthodox world has had its share of dark times, such as the Turkish occupation, and has thus produced its own examples of remnant response. In the difficult 400 years of Ottoman rule, "the Church became a spiritual refuge, the one stable social institution, the cohesive web of Hellenism" (Chrysopoulos 2020). At a time when entire villages were abandoning Christianity, monks like St. Cosmas of Aetolia (1714–1779) gathered some of the faithful into secret schools (το κρυφό σχολειό) to teach the Greek language, preserve their Greek heritage, and keep the people on the path of Orthodoxy (Chrysopoulos 2020). Today, the Orthodox Church has a number of in-Church societies dedicated to specific activities and needs. For example, the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) are dedicated to providing "emergency relief and development programs to those in need worldwide, without discrimination, and strengthen the capacity of the Orthodox Church to so respond. IOCC helps to expand the capacity of the Orthodox Church globally to more effectively minister to people in need" (IOCC 25 Years 2020). Together, the Orthodox Church in America and the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America list close to one hundred organizations dedicated to good and noble causes from education to charity, from theology to fundraising. Oddly, there are no societies dedicated specifically to the promotion of the rich spiritual heritage of the Eastern Church or the spiritual life of its members. Perhaps, the majority of the Orthodox are not aware of the severity of the darkness, but the present situation is no less dire than the one faced during the Ottoman occupation and requires no less of a St. Cosmas-like remnant response. We are losing the very things that define the Church. Therefore, given the precedence set by the many other Orthodox societies and the many examples given by saints and martyrs, it seems reasonable to respond to the present darkness by establishing another "society," one in which Orthodox survivors could, like their Methodist counterparts, gather to ask "How is it with your soul?" and provide instruction and support on the spiritual life. If members can set themselves apart in order to provide food to the hungry, then why not facilitate and preserve spiritual life and teaching?

5. Remembering

Perhaps, one could call it the Society of Light and say that it is dedicated to supporting those who have, in spite of the present darkness, caught a glimpse of the light through the Eucharist. Its basic activity would be remembering. Consider the remnant of Israel forcibly taken off into Babylonian captivity. Separated from Jerusalem and the temple, they were literally unable to bring sacrifice, to worship, and "by the rivers of Babylon, [they] sat down, yea, we wept when [they] remembered Zion" (Ps 137.1). What is remarkable here is that they are said to have acknowledged their loss, faced up to their grief, and found ways of processing it. They tried to nurture the remembrance of Jerusalem. The word used here in the LXX is μιμνήσκομαι (Kittel et al. 1985). This concept is central to the biblical view of God remembering certain persons and turning to them in grace and mercy (Gn. 8:1; 19:29; 30:22; Ex. 32:13; 1 S. 1:11, 19; 25:31). However, another basic aspect of this term is that the followers of God remember His past acts, His commandments (Nu. 15:39–40; Dt. 8:2, 18). In fact, a whole theology of remembering is developed (Dt. 5:15; 7:18; 8:2, 18; 9:7; 15:15; 16:3, 12; 24:18, 20, 22; 32:7) around the idea of remembering past struggles (Dt. 15:15; 16:12; 24:18, 20, 22) as a means of leading to new obedience and trust. The commands of Christ display power in that they are alive in the disciples through recollection (ἀνάμνησις) (Mk. 14:72; Mt. 26:75; Lk. 22:61) (Kittel et al. 1985). This, then, is an active calling to mind of the past. It is not merely remembering or historicizing, but rather, in accordance with the active sense of ἀνάμνησις, a making present of the Lord through His words and in the Eucharist. All recollection serves to maintain the purity of faith by "reliving of vanished impressions by a definite act of will" (Kittel et al. 1985).

This, then, is what our new society, our gathering of spiritual survivors will be doing—remembering. Making real and present again—remembering things that have been lost or are being lost to the darkness—the light of Christ's presence in the Eucharist, the practical knowledge of the Bible and Tradition, the ascetic exercise of the spiritual life (fasting, overcoming the passions, guarding the heart, pure prayer of the heart), and the ability to effectively bear witness. These small groups of survivors will withdraw in order to study the Scriptures, revive and engage in the ancient practices of prayer, fasting, and overcoming the passions. They will seek to rediscover the hesychast disciplines of meditation and the use of the Jesus Prayer. Moreover, they will reengage their own tradition of art and music by remembering the lost art of chanting, singing, and iconography. Of course, doing this as a group will also require relearning the practice of dialog, transcending ourselves, abandoning personal "truths" in favor of Scripture and Tradition. The small remnant of survivors will be tasked with preserving by remembrance and actual practice everything that has been lost to the contemporary compromise.

6. Reigniting a New Dawn

As these survivors remember and reactivate the basic elements of the spiritual life, they will themselves be remembered. Our remembering is met by divine remembrance of the faithful, bringing them grace and mercy (Gn. 8:1; 19:29; 30:22; Ex. 32:13; 1 S. 1:11, 19; 25:31). In doing so, God creates or recreates a new situation among the remnant, remembering (making immediately real) above all His covenant, recommitting Himself to the grace promised (Gn. 9:15–16; Ex. 2:24; 6:5; Lv. 26:42; Ps. 104:8; 110:5; Ez. 16:60; 2 Macc. 1:2). Therefore, there is a clear connection between the saving action of God and effective remembering (Lk 1:54, 1:72). The effects of God's gracious remembering re-manifest themselves among the members of the remembering remnant. The spark of light blazes up in one's consciousness, from the hidden part of the heart, in all its brilliance (Staniloae 2002, p. 195). It is like the spreading light of a new dawn which begins to encompass everything. It is in this that the remnant fulfills its ultimate purpose. Having grasped the flame, preserved it, reignited it by means of remembrance, it now renews the Church and illuminates the world around it. Supported by renewed spiritual power, the survivors call others to follow, and new life will spread and reignite a new dawn for the

Church. This is how the lost will be found, how the repository of truth will be reacquired, dialog reenabled, and the ability to make moral discriminations rediscovered.

7. Conclusions

A new dark age has come upon us. Moral discourse in North America has been brought to a near standstill by the widespread abandoning of truth in favor of personal opinion. This self-centeredness, often expressed in unrestrained quest for material wealth, has fragmented, isolated, and so corrupted the workings of contemporary society that knowledge is being lost, history is being disregarded, and expertise is being abandoned. Living in opinion bubbles, most are left to their own devices, to define their own knowledge, truth, and morality. This cannot and will not turn out well. Intensifying the darkness is the sad fact that many Christians, who could speak truth to power, who could bear witness to the light, have themselves been morally bankrupted, incapacitated, by aligning themselves with the very thought and behavior that is destroying culture at large. For that reason, they are often seen as hypocrites, or even worse, as betrayers of the teaching and person of Christ, no longer in need of being troubled by what should be the consciousness-rattling effects of inconsistency. That tension, it seems, has been "resolved" by utter capitulation. If those who are to bring the light are themselves swallowed up by the darkness, what is to be done?

During the dark ages of the past, there always were a few spiritual survivors who gathered around the sparks of light in order to preserve that which was being lost and in the hope of nurturing it back to full brilliance in their own lives and from there back into the Church and society. Known variously as ascetics, monastics, even solitaries, these members of the spiritual remnant gathered and actively remembered truly Christian teachings and practices, spiritual knowledge and disciplines, and thus saved them from the death of disremembering, making them real and present once again.

Is one to simply wait for some new Benedict to ignite another monastic movement? Are individuals to deliberately assume a neo-monastic way of living in contrast to, as a protest against the darkness? Are believers to develop some new program, some novel set of activities? Does one refocus attention on the existing monasteries? Indeed, there are already, at least in the Orthodox world, many monastic communities in which the light of truth is being preserved. While they have, at times, and certainly could once again provide a context for remnant activity, they exist today at some remove from local parishes and for that reason have little direct influence on the lives of ordinary parishioners. What history has shown us is that the remnant has always been activated within the Church. Spiritual survivors aided by the grace of God recognize one another and are naturally drawn together by their desire to preserve the light. They may, on their own, seek out fellow survivors with whom they can study the scriptures, develop spiritual practices, relearn the art of prayer. However, what is needed today is first and foremost parishioners, priests, and pastors who by God's grace develop a remnant awareness and begin to promote Church-wide awareness and acknowledgement of the remnant. Recognizing the work already being done, these "prophets" will intentionally encourage the spiritual desire of the remnant and nurture it by creating in-Church opportunities for the survivors to gather, remember, and reignite. These survivors are already here with us, and it will not take much encouragement for their spark to enflame and reillumine the whole Church.

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Notes

1 Throughout this essay, a distinction is made between the Church as such and the specific instances of that ideal (Churches or churches). Moreover, the theological affirmations of the Eastern Orthodox tradition as to the conditions under which a group can legitimately be called a Church are consistently applied. Unlike the device used by Vatican II (Church/separated brethren), the Church is capitalized when referring to that Orthodox definition and used in lower case to refer to other Christian groupings. This is not meant to call into question the faith of those who worship and serve in non-Orthodox Christian fellowships. It is simply an attempt to use the terms in a manner consistent with the definitions and theological affirmations of my own Church.

2 For an extensive overview of this aspect of language, semantics, and philosophy, see (Gasparri and Marconi 2021).

3 There are, of course, other meanings of the term "Orthodox," but this is how it is used here.

4 See my discussion on identity and belonging in (Rommen 2009).

5 A number of observers have been using the term "conservative Christian" to describe an amorphous group of individuals who appear to be Christian, still identify themselves as Christian (mostly Evangelical), but are united in their commitment to conservative politics and social policy rather than the theological and historical factors mentioned above. In other words, the term "conservative Christian" is not used by these authors to gather together diverse members of some faith community-transcending consensus, but is rather an expression of perceived alliances between self-identified Christians and certain political and social orientations. Consider the words of Kobes Du Mez, "For conservative white evangelicals, the 'good news' of the Christian gospel has become inextricably linked to a staunch commitment to patriarchal authority, gender difference, and Christian nationalism, and all of these are intertwined with white racial identity. Many Americans who now identify as evangelicals are identifying with this operational theology . . . " (Du Mez 2020).

6 Merriam–Webster defines "evangelical" as "emphasizing salvation by faith in the atoning death of Jesus Christ through personal conversion, the authority of Scripture, and the importance of preaching as contrasted with ritual."

7 This has been going on since the 1960s when people like Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and others got a taste for political power at a national level and terms like the "moral majority" came into vogue (see (Andersen 2017)).

8 One of the most shocking expressions of this alignment came on January 06, 2021, when a mob of seditionists motivated by the conspiracy theory that the 2020 election had been "stolen," besieged and attacked the US capitol. "At the siege, the presence of white conservative Christians was unmistakable. The Proud Boys stopped to pray to Jesus on their march toward the Capitol, and the crowd held signs proclaiming Jesus saves and god's word calls them out. One flag read jesus is my savior. trump is my president" (Kerby 2021).

9 "Skeptics may henceforth be disinclined to consider Christianity because they'll think of hypocrisy when they think of evangelicals" (Godwin 2020).

10 Obviously, the Reformation itself would seem to belie this idea, and it did open the floodgates of division and radical separatism. Nevertheless, many others—-the Eastern ascetics, Medieval Western monastics, and many within the churches spawned by the Reformation—-have been rather more cautious and have often chosen to remain and seek reform within the groups they belong to.

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Rediscovering a Biblical and Early Patristic View of Atonement through Orthodox–Evangelical Dialogue

Petro Kovaliv

Theology Department, Ukrainian Evangelical Theological Seminary, 04075 Kyiv, Ukraine; petro.kovaliv@uets.net

Abstract: One of the most effective ways to discover (or rediscover) truth is through dialogue. I believe that both Orthodox and Evangelicals have something important to offer for a reconstruction of a holistic biblical concept of atonement. Orthodox theology has an important perspective to offer, which is not well-known in Western theology—an ontological perspective on atonement. However, Orthodox theologians have lacked assertiveness, clarity, and comprehensiveness in their presentation of this view, especially in connection with biblical texts. In Protestant theology, we can find many critiques of inadequate existing views as well as in-depth biblical study of separate atonement ideas, but what is lacking is a holistic concept of atonement that would be able to harmoniously integrate various biblical atonement metaphors and also faithfully reflect the early patristic view. I believe that an ontological perspective on atonement combined with the integration of key biblical atonement ideas and metaphors can bring us back to the heart of the apostolic and early church gospel message. Several issues have hindered accomplishing such a project in the past. I will point to these problems and show some possible solutions. Finally, I will present the ontological perspective and show how it can integrate various biblical atonement metaphors.

Keywords: atonement; redemption; ransom; metaphor; concept; theory of atonement; kerygma; Orthodox; Evangelical; theology

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1. Introduction

Christ's atonement is at the very heart of the Christian faith. Unfortunately, among Christians there is very little unity regarding what it means and what exactly was accomplished on the cross. David Hoekema states this sad fact: "Due to the lack of a single doctrinal concept of atonement, the traditions of different ecclesiastical bodies have diverged in the interpretation of this teaching" (Хокема 1999, pp. 225–26). Many theologians of different streams have offered their perspectives on what atonement is all about, but none of the existing "theories of atonement" have been able to gain wide support.

1.1. The Present Situation in Regards to the Theology of Atonement among Protestants and Orthodox Christians

1.1.1. General Overview of Dominant Protestant and Orthodox Perspectives on Atonement

Usually, in a standard Evangelical theology textbook's overview of the main theories of atonement, we will find the following: (1) ransom (from Satan) views (RV)[1], (2) moral influence theories (MIT) (3) the satisfaction theory of Anselm of Canterbury (ST), and (4) the penal substitution atonement theory (PSA) (e.g., Grudem 1994, pp. 695–711; Erickson 1990, pp. 783–800). In recent decades, the *Christus Victor* (CV) perspective has also become popular, but I agree with the criticism of Kathryn Tanner that CV cannot be considered a theory of atonement since it offers no mechanism of atonement and should rather be viewed as an important biblical motif (Tanner 2010, p. 253). There are a number of other perspectives, but they remain marginal.

Among Orthodox scholars we can find three major perspectives (Козлов 2010, pp. 304–11; Гнедич 2007, p. 439): (1) the legal view[2], (2) the moral view[3], and (3) the organic or ontological

view[4] (Козлов 2010, pp. 304–11), while Gnedich uses the term "ontological understanding" (Гнедич 2007, p. 439).. As an example of the variety of approaches on atonement among Orthodox scholars, we can look to the works of theologians of the Russian Orthodox Church. However, a similar diversity of views can be found in the theological works of other Orthodox churches. Gnedich offers an important study of the history of atonement teaching in the Orthodox theology of Eastern Europe from the late 19th through the mid-20th century (Гнедич 2007). Gnedich shows how, at that time, Orthodox theology lacked a clear doctrinal presentation on this issue, so many theologians filled the gap by presenting a teaching on atonement within a legal framework, borrowing ideas from Catholic and Protestant theology. For example, legal language very similar to Anselm's satisfaction view can be found in the writings of St. Theophan the Recluse and in major systematic theology textbooks in Russian by Metropolitan Makary (Bulgakov) and Archbishop Filaret (Gumilevsky). Moreover, theologians and scholars like Pavel Svetlov, Mikhail Tareev, Victor Nesmelov, and others felt that a legal explanation of atonement was a move in the wrong direction, and they offered to look at atonement through a moral perspective. Archimandrite Sergius (Stragorodsky) also put significant emphasis on the moral aspect of salvation, often neglecting the objective aspect accomplished through Christ's death and resurrection.

In response to these tendencies, Orthodox theologians like Florovsky and Lossky called for a return to the dominant Eastern patristic perspective and offered what is called an "organic" or "ontological perspective" (OP) (or theory) of atonement[5]. Florovsky emphasized that "it was necessary to return to the Fathers more fully," especially to the ontological component of the doctrine of atonement (Флоровский 2009, p. 557). Unfortunately, Florovsky was not able to finish his book on atonement, in which he wanted to provide an alternative to various, in his opinion, mistaken trends in Orthodox theology[6]. Therefore, an ontological perspective was never fully developed and clearly presented, especially in connection with the biblical material and integration of various biblical metaphors, themes, and ideas into this concept.

Other names that are sometimes used to refer to this view are "biological," "physical," "naturalistic," "magical," and "mystical." Most of these names are used by liberal scholars, often to describe what is sometimes called the "physical theory of atonement," which teaches about the transformation of human nature due to Christ's Incarnation. The term "ontological" is used primarily in Orthodox literature in Eastern Europe and describes the view that holds that Christ through His death and resurrection delivers human nature from death and corruption and imparts to it qualities of immortality and incorruption. This view differs from the "physical theory" by its emphasis on the death and resurrection of Christ to achieve redemption.

Some Orthodox also talk about redemption from Satan's power, but this idea usually serves as an addition to other perspectives, rather than as a separate theory. At the same time it is possible to find marginal views among the Orthodox like that of Metropolitan Antony (Khrapovitsky) who taught about redemption through Christ's suffering in Gethsemane.

Archpriest Maxim Kozlov summarizes the current state of affairs in this field of theology in the following way: "There is no single doctrine of atonement, at least in Russian Orthodox theology, in contrast to most other sections of dogma. For example, the doctrine of the Incarnation, the doctrine of the Trinity in almost all dogmatic systems, in all textbooks of dogmatic theology are presented identically—there may be different shades, but, as a rule, there are no significant differences. There is no such consensus about the doctrine of atonement. Different authors . . . understand and teach about the atonement in very different ways, there are several different 'theories', none of which can claim to be completely official, as the only one claiming to be the final expression of church truth" (Гнедич 2007, p. 13). I believe it is important to finish the project that Florovsky started and to present OP not just as an Orthodox or Eastern patristic theory but also as a biblical view, which avoids many problems that are present in other popular perspectives. However,

before we can firmly lay the foundation of this view, it is important to clear the ground first and remove the obstacles that may hinder formulation of this position on atonement.

The goal of this article is to highlight the main issues that have been preventing formulation of the holistic concept of atonement built on OP, to offer ways of dealing with the obstacles, to present an ontological perspective on atonement, and to provide general guidelines regarding how it can integrate various biblical atonement metaphors. Since this article was written in the context of Orthodox–Evangelical dialogue, I interact primarily with theological views of these two streams of Christianity. However, I believe that the conclusions made will also be significant for Catholic theology, which, according to the words of Catholic theologian François Brune, today is at a "dead end" regarding their contemporary atonement theology (Брюн 2019, p. 32).

1.1.2. The Present Situation Regarding Dialogue between Orthodox Christians and Evangelicals on the Issue of Atonement

Unfortunately, we see very little real dialogue between Orthodox and Protestants on the issue of atonement. There are several reasons for this. First of all, there has been little familiarity in the West with Orthodox theology in general. Only in recent decades do we see a growing interest in Orthodox theology and Eastern patristics among Protestants, which is reflected in a number of new books, articles, and dissertations in this area. Yet, if we talk specifically about the issue of atonement, unfortunately, it seems that Protestants have not yet been able to see that Orthodox theology can offer something substantial on this topic. As we have shown already, most Evangelical theology textbooks do not offer an ontological perspective on the atonement as a valid option since, most likely, the authors are not even familiar with it. There have been various attempts among Protestants to rediscover the patristic view of atonement, but very often such endeavors are either too general to provide a clear picture of the patristic perspective or they try to show the historicity of a certain view, but they fail to take their research far enough.

At the same time, many Evangelicals, holding Scripture as the highest authority, did not feel that they could consider as a valid option any position that ignores or rejects the legal language of Scripture, which is also quite prevalent in writings of the Church Fathers. Many Orthodox theologians, even in the best presentations, have a tendency to reject or to ignore legal metaphors in the Bible. For example, Florovsky in his presentation of the atonement is quite cautious toward legal metaphors and even calls them "colorless anthropomorphism" (Florovsky 1976b, p. 101, see also pp. 102–3).

Moroever, those who hold to OP have not been able to offer much to show the biblical foundations of their position. For example, Florovsky had difficulty in integrating the biblical concepts of "sacrifice," "ransom," and "justice" into his view of atonement (Florovsky 1976b, p. 101). The problem was that he viewed these concepts through an interpretation, which he himself criticized as "legal" and "transactional." At the same time, in many contemporary Protestant works we see an attempt to reinterpret many legal theological concepts (justice, justification, judgement, punishment, etc.) in order to avoid unbalanced views. We can also find much excellent research of the biblical concepts of "sacrifice," "ransom," etc., which could be harmoniously integrated into an ontological perspective of atonement. Despite similar critiques of incorrect interpretations and passion to represent faithful biblical teaching among many Protestant and Orthodox theologians, there is very little theological dialogue between them on these issues.

Certain Protestants' distrust of the Orthodox teaching on atonement is caused by what Fr. Andrew Louth calls "a tendency among Orthodox theologians to play down the crucifixion and lay all the emphasis on the resurrection" (Louth 2019, p. 32). At the same time, the Orthodox view on atonement is integrated into the theology of deification, which many Protestants are not very familiar with and also look at with suspicion.

Probably, other than the works of Georges Florovsky, one of the best presentations of the ontological perspective has been offered not by Orthodox but by Protestant scholar Benjamin Myers, though he calls it a "patristic atonement model" (Myers 2015). Yet, in Myers' article, we do not see any references to Orthodox theology on atonement. I

believe that as we have more dialogue about this perspective, OP can become not only a sound alternative to many existing views, but it also has the powerful potential to become a unifying perspective on atonement that can be embraced by Orthodox, Catholics, and Protestants.

2. Key Obstacles to the Formation of a Comprehensive Concept of the Atonement

Despite much research in the area of the atonement and soteriology in general, several theological issues have been hindering the process of formation of a comprehensive concept of atonement. I want to point these issues out and offer some solutions to each one of them.

2.1. Lack of Clarity in Soteriological Terminology

One of the first and most basic problems is the way various terms that describe salvation and atonement are used by various authors. Such terms as *salvation, atonement, reconciliation, redemption, work of Christ*, etc. are used by some to refer to the totality of Christ's salvific work and, by others, to a particular aspect of salvation. In some soteriological perspectives, terms like "salvation" and "work of Christ" are reduced to the objective work on the cross and thus miss the idea that these terms can also be applied to other aspects of Christ's salvific work. Obviously, such a diversity of theological positions and use of terminology brings much confusion and misunderstanding and hinders the formation of a unified perspective on atonement. I will use the term "salvation" to describe all the fullness of Christ's salvific work, and the words "atonement" and "redemption" will be used to describe specifically Christ's objective work accomplished through His death and resurrection.

2.2. Misuse of Metaphorical Language

The process of theological interpretation can become even more complicated by misunderstanding how metaphorical language works both in Scripture and in theology. In addition to the diverse usage of soteriological terminology in literature on atonement, we can find a variety of terms used to describe metaphorical language, such as *metaphor, image, model, theory, analogy*, etc., that can refer to very different metaphorical constructs. We may have a situation in which certain metaphors or images found in the writings of a certain theologian or Church Father are viewed as proof that he holds to a certain "theory of atonement." Such evaluations may be very superficial, missing the real essence of the teaching of the author. A proper understanding of any theological position that uses metaphorical language can be hindered by the lack of clear definition for various metaphorical categories. I believe that the works of Protestant scholars like Oliver Crisp (Crisp 2015, 2017), Ian Barbour (Barbour 1974), Ian Ramsey (Ramsey 1957, 1971, 1973), and many others can be very helpful in bringing some clarity into the area of use of metaphorical language, especially dealing with models and theories as key elements of the formation of any theological concept. In this article, I attempt to show the difference between these categories (metaphors, models, theories) and show the importance of such distinctions in atonement theology.

2.3. Separation of Atonement Theology from the Apostolic Kerygma

I believe that the neglect of the centrality of apostolic kerygma in the formation of the concept of the atonement has led to many incorrect interpretations. N. T. Wright is right when he points to the danger of detaching various theories from the biblical story and shows that, in these cases, "their central themes can be subtly transformed to carry significantly different meanings" (Wright 2016, p. 185). This is what happened in various attempts to reconstruct the biblical concept of atonement, when theologizing about this issue was removed from the biblical narrative and especially from the story presented in apostolic kerygma. Sometimes we desperately look for the answer while it lies right on the surface in front of us. For example, Simon Gathercole provided a very solid defense of the biblical idea of substitution and summarized it in a short statement: Jesus "did something,

underwent something, so that we did not and would not have to do so" (Gathercole 2015, p. 15). Many theologians develop very complex theories about that "something" He underwent, while dozens of New Testament passages clearly state it: Christ died and rose again. It is here, in this simple apostolic kerygma, that we have the key to a reconstruction of the biblical atonement concept.

2.4. Lack of a Holistic Hamartiological Perspective

Atonement as a solution to a certain problem is closely connected to the way we view sin and other related problems (guilt, punishment for sin, etc.) that need to be resolved. Scot McKnight observes that our view of "sin defines how we approach atonement" (McKnight 2007, p. 48). Therefore, in order to understand atonement properly, we must clearly see the problem it is dealing with. If we fail to do this, we will end up with a distorted or reductionistic view of sin, which will lead to a distorted or reductionistic view of salvation and atonement. This is exactly what has happened in many atonement perspectives. Everyone would agree that atonement is supposed to resolve the problem of sin. However, in many atonement theories, their view of sin reflects more of their own culture than of a biblical understanding of sin. If we want to grasp the biblical view of atonement, we need to return to the right understanding of the biblical concept of sin.

2.5. Lack of a Holistic Soteriological Perspective

One of the biggest areas of confusion in many works on atonement results from a very reductionistic view of salvation and the work of Christ. Many Christians and Christian theologians associate salvation with the redemption accomplished on the cross, or forgiveness of sins, or justification. Yet, we need to remember that "salvation" is a biblical metaphor that can be used in very different ways and indeed can mean forgiveness of sins, or sanctification, or redemption. So, it is possible to use this word in any of these specific narrow senses. However, if we talk about salvation as God's complete salvific mission, it is much broader than any of these narrow aspects, and it includes God's response to all aspects of the problem of sin and its consequences. What Christ has accomplished through His death and resurrection is part of God's holistic salvific work but is not the totality of it. Problems with understanding atonement cannot be avoided if we fail to see the broad holistic picture of salvation and the place of atonement as one of its key elements.

3. Building a Holistic Concept of Atonement on the Foundation of an Ontological Perspective

Having looked at some particular issues that can prevent us from being able to form a holistic concept of atonement, now I want to present a general outline of the atonement perspective, which I believe is both faithful to the Scripture and to the early patristic tradition. As I said earlier, in Orthodox theology we can find some important foundational guidelines, which then can be enriched by contemporary Protestant biblical scholarship for our task of presenting a concept of atonement that is both Scriptural and patristic. Before I present an ontological perspective on atonement and its biblical foundation, I need to respond to the main problems mentioned in the previous section since the answers will serve as a foundation of the view that I present.

3.1. Metaphors as Key Building Blocks of the Concept of Atonement

Since many contemporary scholars recognize that theological language is fundamentally metaphorical (Boersma 2006, p. 105), we could say that the history of many Christian doctrines, including the doctrine of atonement, is the history of the use and abuse of metaphors in theology. In biblical teaching on atonement, metaphors are the main means through which biblical authors verbalize the concept of atonement. Therefore, proper interpretation of these metaphors is the key to grasping the biblical concept and formulating it. Using the biblical metaphor of "ransom" as an example, I briefly present how biblical metaphors have been used and abused in the formation of models, theories, and concepts of the atonement.

C. S. Lewis provided a simple definition of metaphor: "thinking (and often then speaking) of a lesser known reality in terms of a better known one that is in some significant way similar to it" (Macky 1982, p. 206). In each metaphor we have a partial mapping of these similarities from the source domain to the target domain. Each metaphor highlights only certain aspects of the object or concept we are describing. Zoltan Kovecses distinguishes between a simple metaphor and a complex metaphor and shows that simple metaphors can form a cluster of metaphors, which together form a complex metaphor (Kovecses 2010, pp. 103, 145), which can work as a metaphorical model. For example, in Scripture we find a number of simple metaphors (*slavery, freedom, price paid, Redeemer*, etc.), which together form a *biblical model of ransom* that presents to us a metaphorical perspective on what has been accomplished by Christ on the cross: we were in "slavery," but through the "price" of Christ's life (or blood) we have been "redeemed" (delivered) and now we are "free." Using a familiar first-century reality of slavery and the redemption from slavery, the biblical authors provided us a partial revelation of our target domain (what happened on the cross).

We need to remember that not every element of the source domain is mapped into the target domain. In other words, analogy is always limited. For example, Scripture never tells us to whom the price is paid, what happens with the price that was paid, etc. These elements are not part of the metaphorical analogy intended by the original author(s). Therefore, metaphors and metaphorical models always provide us only a limited presentation of reality. If we try to get from a metaphor more than it is supposed to provide, we begin to distort the meaning of the metaphor. No single metaphor is able to present a full picture of reality. This is why we need multiple metaphors in order to reconstruct a biblical concept of atonement, where each metaphor will provide a certain fragment of the larger conceptual picture.

Unfortunately, on the way to reconstructing a biblical concept of atonement, many have taken a wrong route. In order to get a full picture (or outline) of the concept, they began to extend metaphorical analogy and to develop new entailments deduced from the source domain. For example, Origen began to ask: "to whom is the price of redemption paid?", and as a result, he added new elements to the limited biblical model of ransom. As a result, in RV they may often talk about the devil as the one who had legal rights to hold humanity in slavery and God had to pay him the price to make us free. We see the development of what we can call *a theological atonement theory*, which takes a limited *biblical metaphorical model* and begins to develop it by adding new elements of analogy to interpretation. What we have in the end is a literalization of metaphor and the formation of a new narrative, which becomes dominant in a certain atonement perspective. Thus, a limited *biblical ransom model* that shows us that God made us free through the costly act of Christ, turns into a "full story" *theological ransom theory* that provides a complete explanation of how redemption has been accomplished.

Something similar happened with the cluster of legal metaphors of Scripture. The biblical model of release from condemnation of death through Christ's death and resurrection turned into a number of *legal theological theories*, with PSA as the most famous of them. According to PSA, on the cross, Christ takes upon Himself God's legal punishment that we deserve: God pours out His wrath against sin on Jesus and turns His face from Him, and Christ experiences the terrible condemnation of spiritual death. Once God's judgement is accomplished, His wrath is appeased, and there is now no condemnation for those for whom Christ suffered. Again, we see how a limited *biblical metaphorical model* of release from condemnation obtains new details in order to become a "full picture." However, as we said, metaphorical presentation of concept can never provide a "full picture" since it goes against the very nature of metaphor. Thus, what we have as a result of such a process is the literalization of metaphorical presentation and the formation of a completed model or narrative, while Scripture always provides only a *limited metaphorical model*.

Because of such literalization, in each theory of atonement we have a new narrative of what happened on the cross, which often becomes the central dominant narrative. In PSA,

it is the story of God punishing Christ instead of us with spiritual death. In RV, it is the story of God paying the devil the ransom price. The problem is that neither of these two narratives are found in the New Testament. We will not find them in the apostolic kerygma in the book of Acts nor in the apostles' reflections in their epistles when they talk about what happened on the cross. These two narratives are only constructed in the process of *a particular interpretation* of certain metaphorical fragments. At the same time, in Scripture we have a clear redemptive narrative, which is repeated dozens of times in different forms but is often neglected in many atonement theories, as I will show further.

In my view, forming a biblical concept of atonement through the literalization and development of a certain *biblical model* into a full *theory of atonement* is a wrong approach since it goes against the very nature of a metaphor and how it works. For example, when Scripture uses the metaphor "Jesus is the bread of life" it maps only certain features of the source domain ("bread") to the target domain ("Jesus"), such as the idea of providing what is needed for life. Yet, if we, not satisfied with such a limited perspective, decide to develop entailments of the source domain and begin to map such ideas as the "origin of bread," "what happens to bread as we eat it," etc., we will end up with wrong ideas that will result in a distorted understanding of the person and work of Christ. The same is true for any other metaphor or metaphorical model. Metaphor always provides us with only a partial understanding of the fragment of reality it describes. Any attempt to add new elements to a *limited biblical metaphorical model* in order to have a "fuller picture" will automatically distort our understanding of the metaphor and of the concept it forms.

How should we form our concepts then? In many ways, the work of a theologian is similar to someone who puts together a big picture of a jigsaw puzzle. Irenaeus of Lyon uses a powerful image that describes the importance of the process of the formation of doctrine (Irenaeus, *AH* 1.8.1 (see also 1.9.4))[7]. He compared biblical images with precious stones, from which the artist made a beautiful image of the king. However, others take these precious stones and make of them an image of a dog or a fox but call it the image of a king, indicating that they use the same stones. Irenaeus, using such a vivid metaphor, skillfully shows that in order to see and understand the true "image of the king," it is not enough to just use the "precious stones" of Scripture, but these "stones" must be correctly placed in the right relationship to each other, because only when they are placed in the right order can they present us with the right image.

Various New Testament texts present different elements of the reality of Christ's atonement, and we have quite a difficult task to bring all of these elements together and integrate them into one holistic concept of atonement. In order to do that, we need to have some structure or contours that provide us with the shape of the big picture. We noticed that in any perspective on atonement, we find a key narrative. Michael Root highlights that narrative is unavoidable in soteriology since it "presumes two states of human existence, a state of deprivation (sin, corruption) and a state of release from that deprivation (salvation, liberation), and an event that produces a change from the first state to the second," which forms "the sufficient conditions of a narrative" (Root 1986, p. 145).

Therefore, we could say that the biblical concept of atonement is presented through a number of what we would call *metaphorical narrative models,* which we could associate with root metaphors (redemption, reconciliation, forgiveness, justification, etc.). These models usually present a problem (debt, slavery, guilt, etc.), a state of freedom from this problem, and some additional details (e.g., "price of ransom"). It is interesting to notice that the event that produces change in most cases is the death and resurrection of Christ.

I think here it is important to differentiate between *historical narrative* and *metaphorical narrative*, which serves as one of the ways to present *historical narrative*. In describing the past event of my visit to a friend and giving him a book (*historical narrative*), I can say: "I paid him my debt." Depending on the context, giving a book and paying my debt could be two different things (two lines of *historical narrative*), or it could be that "paying the debt" is a metaphorical way of describing the returning of a book to my friend (*metaphorical narrative*). Thus, one of the most critical issues in the theology of atonement will be the

decisions we need to make, whether, in different descriptions of what happened on the cross, we are dealing with *historical narrative* or *metaphorical narrative* that presents historical narrative through metaphor. I believe that one of the main problems with many atonement theories is that they literalized metaphors and interpreted certain *metaphorical narratives* as historical narrative. By doing this, they not only took a wrong route but also often ignored or diminished the importance of key redemptive narratives of the New Testament. This brings us to the next point.

3.2. The Apostolic Kerygma as a Basic Structure of the Concept of Atonement

I believe that it is in the apostolic kerygma that we find the key redemptive narrative, which provides us with the structure of the concept of atonement. As we said earlier, instead of trying to reconstruct some hidden narrative of "what really happened" on the cross, we need to pay careful attention to the message of the apostles. In the message of the apostolic church, what happened on the cross is presented to us in the form of a short narrative statement: Jesus died, was buried, and rose again on the third day (see 1 Cor. 15:3–4[8]). This was the central element of the Gospel (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον) (1 Cor. 15:1) or the apostolic "kerygma" (τὸ κήρυγμα) (1 Cor. 15:14), and later it became the central element of what St. Irenaeus called the "rule of faith," which he called the "foundation of the edifice" of all Christian teaching (*AP*, 6)[9].

We are so used to this basic narrative of the creed that often it becomes just a statement of belief in the historical event and we may miss the powerful theological meaning that goes with it, which describes the very essence of atonement. Christ died, having experienced real human death in His nature, but on the third day He rose again, not simply returning back to life (as Lazarus did), but raising His human nature to a new state of immortality and incorruption. Therefore, kerygma proclaims not only a historical event but also a deep theological truth: *Jesus died and rose again, having overcome death in His human nature once and for all*. Apostolic preaching was not about settling with the devil the issue of who owns humanity nor it was about settling legal issues of our status before God. It was about what happened with Christ in his human nature and the benefits it provides for us and our salvation.

This is what provides a foundation and a structure for the further development of a concept of atonement. Obviously, having such a basic structure, we still need more enlightenment about the nature of what happened and what it has done for us, but here we enter a reality that is very difficult to explain. This is why biblical writers use metaphors as one of the main means to talk about reality, which is abstract or unknown to us. According to C. S. Lewis, when we describe things like incarnation, redemption through death, and the resurrection of Christ, we are dealing with two things: "the supernatural, unconditioned reality, and those events on the historical level which its irruption into the natural universe is held to have produced. The first thing is indescribable in 'literal' speech, and therefore we rightly interpret all that is said about it metaphorically. But the second thing is in a wholly different position. Events on the historical level are the sort of things we can talk about literally" (Lewis 1947, p. 97). Therefore, in the NT we have the historical narrative of Christ's death and resurrection presented through a number of metaphors and metaphorical models (or narratives).

We should notice that in the New Testament the apostolic kerygma is often followed by a short but very important statement: all this happened "for our sins"[10], that is, to deal with the problem of "sin". Here we come to the issue, which is the foundation for a holistic ontological concept of atonement.

3.3. The Biblical Concept of Sin as the Foundation of the Biblical Concept of Atonement

Earlier I stressed that our view of sin will determine the way that we view atonement. It is interesting that in Orthodox theology we can find a perspective on sin and its consequences that is somewhat different than a traditional Western understanding. This perspective reflects the view of many Eastern Church Fathers and is much closer to the

biblical Hebrew notion of sin, which we desperately need to return to, since only then will we have a solid foundation for reconstructing a biblical concept of atonement.

Sin in the OT is a complex concept. First, sin has to be viewed primarily through a relational perspective. This is why the Ten Commandments and the whole OT law are presented in the context of covenantal relationships with God. In the New Testament, sin is most of all a failure to live in love toward God and toward neighbors, expressed in the two greatest commandments, which are relational at their core. Often the NT talks about sin in the singular, pointing to the most fundamental *SIN* of broken relationships with God expressed in the failure of trust in, submission to, love for, and worship of God as the ultimate center of human life. This is why one of the main works of the Holy Spirit is to "convict the world concerning sin" (Jn. 16:8 NAS), which is expressed in that "they do not believe in Me" (Jn. 16:9 NAS). This *SIN* leads to multiple *sins* as a distorted dynamic of human life (wrong acts, thoughts, desires, will, etc.), which does not correspond to God's intention and purpose for human life.

But the Hebrew concept of sin also has another dimension. Jay Sklar points out that Old Testament terms for sin "refer not only to the wrong itself, but also to the consequences for the wrong" (Sklar 2005, p. 12). One of the best summaries of the various aspects of the Hebrew concept of sin we find in Mark Biddle's study of sin: "the Bible does not separate the act from the effects that follow fluidly and organically. As a result, usages of the Hebrew noun[11] can be roughly classified into three categories along the deed-consequence continuum: (1) to refer to the wrongful act itself; (2) to denote the state of guilt into which the agent enters; (3) to indicate the consequences suffered by the agent and the environment as guilt 'matures' into results" (Biddle 2005, p. 117). All these meanings are part of one organic continuum, which shows that *sin* as an *act* leads to the condition of "bearing *sin*" as *guilt* or responsibility for one's action and results in *sin* as the devastating and deadly *consequences* that sin triggers. Therefore, guilt and punishment should not be viewed as separate external legal categories but rather as ontological realities closely connected to sin as an act. Mark Biddle stresses that "the biblical viewpoint . . . views sin and its consequences in holistic, organic terms" (Biddle 2005, p. 122).

We can see this very clearly in many NT passages that show the organic unity between sin and death. Death "entered" the world through sin (Rom. 5:12). Paul clearly shows the natural cause-and-effect relationship between sin and death using a variety of organic phytomorphic and farming metaphors: "sinful passions" bring forth "the fruit of death" (Rom. 7: 5), and he who nourishes the sinful desires of the flesh will "reap corruption" (Gal. 6: 8). Death is the "τέλος" of sin, that is, the ontological completion, the culmination of sin (Rom. 6:21). Therefore, it is not so much God who "punishes" with death as sin itself that "kills" a man (Rom. 7:11) and "produces death" (Rom. 7:13). As a result, a person "dies" in his/her sins (Jn. 8:21, 24). A similar relationship, but through the metaphor of conception and birth, is also presented by the apostle James: sin, which begins with desire, "begets death" (James 1:15). It is in light of such an organic connection that we should view the idea that death is a "payment" for sin (Rom. 6:23), but not in a retributive sense. Thus, the relationship between sin and death can be seen as a "law," "the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2), the principle of organic connection, which is especially evident in the Hebrew concept of "sin," in which sin itself and its consequences are called by the same word, as parts of one single concept.

OP has a concept of guilt, but it is viewed in an organic connection with sin and its consequences. Guilt is not a separate legal reality that has to be dealt with in a special way. Guilt is acknowledgement that a person is liable to suffer consequences for his/her sinful act or the condition of the heart. The language of guilt is a way to describe the ontological reality of sin and its consequences by legal terms.

Though we can see the rediscovery of this aspect of the Hebrew concept of sin in many studies of Protestant biblical scholars, not much work has been done in connecting this concept with Christ's atonement. It is in the works of some Eastern Church Fathers that we

can find these ideas brought together. They may express this idea in different ways, but because of the limitation of this work, I will provide only one example.

St. Maximus the Confessor clearly shows us what he calls the "proper distinction between the two senses of the word 'sin'" (Maximus the Confessor 2018, p. 244). In Question 42 of his *The Responses to Thalassios*, he deals with the question of how "the Lord is said to have 'become sin' without knowing sin." His answer is that the word "sin" in Scripture is used in two senses: "the first sin" is "the fall of free choice from the good toward evil," whereas "second sin," a consequence of and the result of the first, is an "alteration of nature from incorruptibility to corruption" (Maximus the Confessor 2018, p. 241). Thus, we see that St. Maximus understood that the word "sin" can mean sin itself and the consequences of sin, which corresponds to how this word was used in the Old Testament. In order to distinguish these two aspects, he uses the phrases "first sin" and "second sin." "The first sin" is what we normally call "sin" as a failure to live according to God's intent. "The second sin" is the natural consequence of the first and is "corruption and mortality in nature" (Maximus the Confessor 2018, p. 243). What Christ deals with in His redemptive work is "the second sin" of corruption and mortality of nature, which Christ restored and "brought about through the resurrection, a return of impassibility, incorruptibility, and immortality" (Maximus the Confessor 2018, p. 244). This does not mean that "the first sin" is not important or that Christ does not deal with that through His salvific work. He does, but the way He does it can only be understood if we have a holistic picture of God's salvation. The next section will deal with a holistic perspective on salvation as the context of the biblical understanding of the atonement.

3.4. Holistic Concept of Salvation as the Context for a Biblical Understanding of the Atonement

If we do not distinguish between various aspects of salvation, we will mix and confuse these realities and will not be able to come to a correct understanding of the atonement. We will define ***salvation*** in its broad sense as *God's work of restoration and perfection of all aspects of human life to God's ultimate purpose.* As such, it includes, first, the restoration of relationships with God, dealing with what we called *SIN,* relational alienation from God. This *SIN* is dealt with in conversion, when a person through the work of the Holy Spirit returns to his Creator in faith, trust, and total commitment of his life to God in order to live according to His will, restoring the most fundamental relationship of his life. Paul talks about this aspect of salvation as deliverance from the *dominion (lordship) of SIN* by coming under the lordship of Christ/God: "you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness . . . you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God" (Rom. 6:17–18, 22 ESV)[12]. Conversion and commitment to God and to the way of discipleship brings freedom from the dominating power of SIN.

Yet, through conversion a Christian does not become perfect. There are various areas in a person's behavior, thought, life, passions, desires, motives, etc. where there is the *presence of sin*, and in which he needs freedom. Jesus described the sanctifying process of discipleship in the following way: "Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, 'If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free'" (Jn. 8:31–32 ESV). When we abide and live in the truth of Christ, we continue in the process of sanctification (Rom. 6:22), becoming and staying free from the presence of sins. Though a Christian has already put off "the old self" in conversion, he needs to continue to be renewed into the image of Christ (Eph. 4:20–32; Col. 3:9–14, etc.).

However, there is another *"sin"* that has to be dealt with. In the Hebrew concept of sin, the consequences of sin were also called "sin." St. Maximus the Confessor called it "second sin," which is mortality and the corruption of nature. Christ deals with this "sin" through His death and resurrection, delivering human nature from mortality and corruption and imparting it with incorruption and immortality. Through the same faith through which we were reunited with God and Christ, we also become partakers of Christ and what He has achieved for us in atonement. Calvin talked about the double grace we receive through

faith: justification and sanctification (*Inst*. III.3.19). Probably it would be better to talk about the triple grace of deliverance from all aspects of sin: to deliver people from *SIN* as the distorted fundamental relationships of human life, Christ called people to come back to Him/to repent and to believe in Him/to deny themselves and to commit to Him and His discipleship (Mk. 1:15; 8:34) (conversion); to make people free from *sins*, He called them to abide in His teaching (Jn. 8:31–32, Mt. 28:20), so that God's truth may sanctify them (Jn. 17:17) (sanctification); but, deliverance from "sin" (as a consequence of the sinful dynamic of life resulting in death and corruption) is accomplished through the death and resurrection of Christ (redemption).

3.5. Ontological Perspective on Atonement

It is in Orthodox theology that we find a clear statement about the particular area of the problem Christ deals with on the cross. Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky states, "The redeeming work of the Son is related to our nature" (Лосский 2000, p. 287). We have already seen in the writings of St. Maximus the Confessor that in His death and resurrection, Christ deals with "second sin," that is, mortality and corruption of our nature, which is the result of sin[13]. This clear understanding of the target of the redemptive work of Christ shows the inadequacy of a moral interpretation of atonement both in Protestant and Orthodox theology and was rightly criticized by many theologians. We understand that many moral atonement views were a reaction to the neglect or lack of emphasis on Christ's dealing with sins as a moral problem. However, the solution is not a reinterpretation of atonement through moral categories but is pointing to the teaching role of Christ and the deliverance from sins through abiding in His teaching (as was shown above). We also recognize that Christ teaches us by His words and example even on the cross, and therefore, there is indeed moral influence through his suffering, but it is not the main meaning of His death.

I believe that an ontological perspective provides a clear biblical explanation of what happened in redemption, basing it on the apostolic kerygma (or apostolic Gospel), which states: "Christ died and rose again." This is very simple, but it is also a deep proclamation about what Jesus "underwent" in order to redeem us: He underwent death and resurrection in His human nature, in His body. It is in his resurrection that death has been overcome permanently: "We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him" (Rom. 6:9 ESV), and now in His nature "the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:54 ESV). Christ "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10 ESV).

An ontological perspective clearly shows that the problem Christ deals with on the cross is *ontological* related to the consequences of sin in human nature. Sin leads to death, destroying human nature through corruption. Christ voluntarily goes to the cross to experience real death, but because of the inseparable presence of divine nature in the person of the Son, death is able to lay hold of Christ only for as long as He allows it. Being the true Life of the world, He has ultimate control of the situation, not death. On the third day, through the power of divine life, which was inseparable from His human nature even in death, Christ breaks the control of death over His human nature, and not only brings His human nature back to life but also transforms it, imparting immortality and incorruption. We could say that Christ heals the human nature and sanctifies it. This is the essence of atonement.

An ontological perspective on redemption is inseparable from an important biblical teaching, which is central both in Reformed theology and in Orthodox theology: union with Christ. It is only in spiritual union with Christ through faith that we become partakers of Christ (Heb. 3:14) and only through being "in Him" that we have all the benefits of His redemption: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Eph. 1:7 KJV). Believers already have the right to these benefits, but they will experience these blessings of the redemption of our nature on the last day in the Resurrection of the

dead. This is why Paul, who said that in Christ we already have redemption (Eph. 1:7, Col. 1:14), also said that we "wait eagerly for . . . the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:23 ESV).

In light of this ontological perspective on atonement, we may understand much better some other important biblical truths. For example, in this view, resurrection is not so much God's confirmation that He has accepted the satisfaction/payment for our sins (as in some legal perspectives), but it is an essential element of atonement. Only from an ontological perspective can we understand why the problem of sin (as consequences) is not resolved, if Christ has not risen[14] and what it means that He was "raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25 ESV). In this perspective, we can understand why faith in the full humanity and divinity of Christ was so important to the early Church, especially for their understanding of the atonement. Christ heals what he assumes[15], but this is possible only through the hypostatic union of His human nature with His divine nature in His person. St. Basil shows very clearly the importance of divine nature in the atonement: "death in the flesh . . . was swallowed up by the divine nature"[16] (Basil 1939, p. 83).

This perspective on atonement is not something new, but rather is the oldest tradition of understanding atonement present in the writings of practically all of the Church Fathers, in Church creeds, and in early liturgies. I believe it is sufficient to provide one quote from Calvin to show that this understanding of atonement was never lost from Christian theology. Calvin said: "Death held us captive under its yoke; Christ, in our stead, gave himself over to its power to deliver us from it . . . By dying, he ensured that we would not die, or—which is the same thing—redeemed us to life by his own death."[17] Unfortunately, when Calvin makes a major emphasis on the spiritual death of Christ, then the ontological perspective, which was the heart of the message of the early Church, becomes secondary, giving place to a new narrative about Christ paying "a greater and more excellent price in suffering in his soul the terrible torments of a condemned and forsaken man" (Inst., 2.16.10) (Calvin et al. 2006, p. 516), a narrative which we will not find as part of apostolic kerygma or early creeds. As mentioned above, the problem of "spiritual death" (or *SIN*) is resolved not by Christ "dying spiritually" instead of us but through conversion of a person to God[18].

3.6. Integration of Atonement Metaphors into an Ontological Perspective

It goes beyond the scope of this article to show in detail how multiple biblical metaphors and metaphorical models of atonement represent various aspects of the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection. Yet, in this section, I want to show a general direction regarding how these metaphors can be integrated into an ontological perspective on atonement.

I believe that the ontological reality of Christ's deliverance of human nature from death and corruption is clearly presented in Scripture in the apostolic kerygma, but it is also described by numerous atonement metaphors. Gordon Fee is right when he says: "A careful reading of Paul's letters reveals that all of his basic theological concerns are an outworking of his fundamental confession: 'Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; he was buried, and he was raised' (1 Cor 15:3–4)" (Fee 2013, p. 483).

As previously said, in His work accomplished through His death and resurrection, Christ deals primarily with the *ontological problem* of the consequences of sin for human nature. This ontological problem and its solution are described in Scripture by different metaphors taken from various domains of human life (legal, cultic, commercial, accounting, etc.). Therefore, we should not hold the view that on the cross Christ had to resolve the problem of a certain spiritual debt that we owed, or the legal condemnation we were under, etc. According to the view of many Church Fathers, our mortality and the corruption of our nature is our "debt" that we need to have "forgiven"; it is our "slavery" that we need to be "redeemed" from; it is our "condemnation," and therefore, we are in need of "justification." Christ is our "Passover lamb" whose shed blood saves us from the "plague" of death. Christ is our "sin offering" who gives His life so that we could live, have our sins forgiven,

and not have to experience the consequence of death for sin. It is insightful, for example, to look at how Irenaeus uses various metaphors in connection to death so that we might see how rich the metaphorical language can be, as it describes the same concept through different images. For example, Irenaeus describes death as "slavery" (*AH* 4.22.1), "debt" (*AH* 3.19.1, 4.22.1, 5.23.2), "captivity" (*AH* 3.23.1), "exile" (*AH* 4.8.2), "power" (*AH* 3.18.7), "condemnation" (*AH* 4.8.2), "reign" (*D*, 31, 39), "dominion" (*AH* 5.13.3), and "oppression" (*AP*, 31). We can find similar language in many Church Fathers and in Scripture. In Romans 5:16–17 we see how the word pair "condemnation"—"justification" is paralleled with "death"—"life".

Therefore, atonement metaphors do not describe separate (legal, slave market, cultic, accounting) realities nor do they represent some *invisible historic narratives* that happen parallel to Christ's death and resurrection. They all describe the same ontological reality, using different metaphors taken from various source domains. Each of these metaphors present a limited metaphorical model out of the general scheme of *problem-agent-process-result* in atonement in which it may highlight only some aspects of the scheme and exclude others. The narrative of each such model is metaphorical and it is never complete according to the very nature of how metaphor works; it is always fragmental with missing elements from a "full story" of the source domain. In the "redemption" metaphorical narrative there is no "receiver of ransom payment." Legal metaphors do not explain *how* those under "condemnation" (of death) are now "justified." "Filling in" such information goes against the limited function of a metaphor and automatically distorts the meaning of a metaphor. The Bible never tells us that guilt or sin was legally transferred to Christ (somehow) or that the Father punished His Son or poured His wrath on Him, as we find it in some legal theories. The legal metaphorical model is limited, and through powerful imagery it only points our attention to *the problem* and *the result* of atonement. Often "what is missing" may be highlighted by an element of another biblical metaphorical model of atonement or by some other biblical statements. This is why we need all the biblical metaphors and models, but we have to embrace them and integrate them into the concept of atonement in their limited nature.

As we evaluate the views of early Church Fathers on atonement, we have to be careful not to confuse their use of certain biblical (or their own innovative) metaphors and models as proof that they support or hold to a certain "theory of atonement" that was developed based on this metaphor/model. We can say that they hold to a certain theory only if they present the full narrative of this theory and take it literally.

At the same time, we need to remember that many metaphors in Scripture are used to describe different aspects of truth. For example, the metaphor of "slavery" can refer to various spheres: "slavery to sin," "slavery to death," or even "slavery to the devil," and therefore, the same metaphorical phrase, such as "deliverance from slavery" or "redemption" may mean "liberation from the slavery of death"[19] or "liberation from the slavery of sin," etc. The same metaphor in a different context may apply to different aspects of soteriology (i.e., redemption vs. sanctification). Therefore, before we interpret any specific metaphor, we need to understand its cultural and theological context and locate each metaphor in its proper place in the large soteriological picture.

Thus, when we talk about integration, it is not the integration of "theories of atonement" into one concept, but it is the integration of limited biblical metaphors and metaphorical models into a holistic concept of atonement. This process has to be part of a larger work of integration of other soteriological metaphors into a holistic concept of salvation, discerning where each metaphor belongs and how it fits into this larger soteriological picture. This task requires a separate extended presentation.

Finally, special attention also needs to be given to the presentation of the ontological view in the context of the biblical meta-narrative. Due to the limited scope of this paper, we have not dealt with this issue, but there is great potential to show a beautiful harmony of the larger biblical story with Christ's redemption viewed through an ontological perspective. For example, many authors, like N. T. Wright, have pointed out that early Christians

viewed Christ's death as the New Exodus. Wright also stresses the importance of temple theology and the topic of forgiveness in light of the biblical story (Wright 2016). However, I want to suggest that Wright's approach could be greatly enriched if he looked at these issues through the OP on atonement. Through Christ, we have the Final Greatest Exodus from the ultimate slavery of death. It is the ultimate Forgiveness of sin through Christ's sacrifice that the prophets prophesied about. Through Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, humanity has access back to the paradise from which it was expelled. He is a New Temple and we, being connected to Him, are living stones in this Temple. There are many other themes that could brought together as we connect the OP on atonement and the biblical meta-narrative.

Atonement has to be seen as part of the larger ultimate purpose of God. In such a perspective, a special emphasis of Orthodox theology is extremely important. According to Greek patristic tradition and many Orthodox theologians, the redemption of humanity is only a step towards God's larger purpose, which is deification. Andrew Louth emphasizes the need to see "the full story of God's dealing with the world that begins with creation and runs through to deification, which is the consequence of union with God that he intended for creation through the human" (Louth 2019, p. 42). According to Louth, "redemption is not an end in itself: its purpose is to facilitate God's original and eternal purpose for his created order, to draw it into union with himself, to deify it" (Louth 2019, p. 36). Therefore, according to OP, Christ's death and resurrection accomplishes not only redemption but also deification of human nature, which is part of God's ultimate purpose for humanity and, in turn, is an integral part of transformation of the whole cosmos.

4. Conclusions

In this article, I pointed to the need in Christian theology to formulate a holistic concept of atonement that would be firmly biblical, would avoid the problems that many existing views have, and would indeed reflect the dominant perspective of the early church. I showed some of the major theological problems that hindered the formation of such a concept and pointed to various solutions to these problems. I believe that the process of the formulation of the biblical concept of atonement can be very productive through dialogue in which Orthodox theology can offer important foundational interpretive guidelines, while the commendable study of Scripture of many Protestant scholars in the area of biblical studies and the sphere of metaphorical theology can provide solid biblical support for such a concept of atonement. It is in Orthodox theology that we find an ontological perspective on atonement that shows that Christ's work accomplished through His death and resurrection deals with the consequences of sin for human nature (death and corruption). The basic structure for this perspective is presented in the apostolic kerygma, and it is also expressed through numerous biblical metaphors and metaphorical models of atonement that highlight the different aspects of this teaching. I pointed to the problem of the literalization of these metaphors and the construction of new narratives of atonement, which form new main lines of interpretation, creating new theories around these literalized *metaphorical narratives*. Such an approach will always lead to a distorted understanding of both the metaphors under consideration and the concept of atonement they form.

The ontological perspective is based on the historical narrative of the apostolic kerygma and understands various biblical metaphors of atonement as the way to express its basic message: *Christ through His death and resurrection delivers human nature from the consequences of sin, which are death and corruption, heals and transforms it, imparting it with immortality and incorruption*. Through a spiritual union with Christ by faith, we become partakers of the benefits of Christ's atonement and will fully experience these benefits in our human nature in the Resurrection of the dead. At the same time, I tried to show that an ontological perspective on atonement has to be seen as part of the larger picture of God's salvific work, which is multifaceted, as Christ brings salvation and restoration not only to our nature but to all aspects of human life.

In light of an ontological understanding of atonement, we need to look afresh at the teaching of the Church Fathers on this topic and instead of trying to find "proofs" of various "theories," we need to look carefully at their usage of metaphors, their view of various aspects of the human predicament, and the different aspects of Christ's work in response to each area of human problems. This approach to understanding of the atonement requires a more in-depth study to show how each atonement metaphor and metaphorical model corresponds to different aspects of the ontological perspective and how other soteriological metaphors are part of a larger soteriological scheme[20]. I also think that it is promising for OP to show how this view is dominant in early liturgies. Study in this area can help us comprehend anew the beauty and the power of Pascal Troparion's proclamation: "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death!"

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Notes

1 Here and further, I will often use abbreviations instead of the full name of the various views or theories.
2 Usually this is a modified version of ST.
3 Using very similar approaches to many Protestant MIT positions.
4 Kozlov calls it an "organic theory"
5 We will describe this view in later sections of this paper.
6 Today we have several separate articles and their various editions, which were supposed to become chapters of this book (Флоровский 1930; Florovsky 1951, 1953, 1976a, 1976b).
7 Here and further *AH* will stand for Irenaeus' work *Against the Heresies*. Quotations will be taken from (Irenaeus 1979).
8 See also Rom. 4:24–25, 1 Thess. 4:14, etc.
9 Here and further *AP* will stand for Irenaeus' work *On the Apostolic Preaching*. Quotations will be taken from (Behr 1998).
10 "Christ died *for our sins*" (1 Cor. 15:3), "Who was delivered *for our offences*" (Rom. 4:24–25), etc.
11 In this case it is a noun "*awon*", but it can also be applied to other Hebrew nouns for sin ("*hatat*", "*het*").
12 There are other ways of describing this conversion in the NT. For example, Paul talks about turning from idols to God (1 Thess. 1:9). But it is always turning to Christ/God as Lord of life (e.g., Acts 9:35, 11:21, 14:15, 15:19, etc.).
13 "First sin" (of the will) according to St. Maximus the Confessor.
14 "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17 ESV).
15 According to the famous words of Gregory of Nazianzus: "What has not been assumed has not been healed" (*Ep.* 101, 32).
16 St. Basil, *Letter CCLXI*.
17 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.16.7 (Calvin et al. 2006, pp. 511–12)
18 See, e.g., "this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again" (Lk. 15:24 NAS).
19 Or "sin" meaning "second sin" (mortality and corruption of nature).
20 This is very important in order to discern what aspect of salvation each soteriological metaphor belongs to. Many problems in the understanding of atonement are the result of a lack of discernment in this area when we try to fit a certain soteriological metaphor or idea into an atonement scheme, while it is part of another aspect of salvation (i.e., as I tried to show it in relation to salvation from spiritual death, using Calvin as an example).

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Charismatic Reformer, Mystic or Father? The Reception of Symeon the New Theologian by Pentecostal/Charismatic Theologians

Maxym Lysack

Faculty of Theology, Saint Paul University, Ottawa, ON K1S 1C4, Canada; mlysack@ustpaul.ca

Abstract: The last three decades have seen a renewed interest on the part of Evangelical scholars in patristic studies. Recently, theologians of the Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition have started to examine the works of Saint Symeon the New Theologian. The latter's emphasis on personal experience of the Holy Spirit and Christification provides a fertile ground for encounter between Orthodox and Pentecostal/Charismatic scholars. Recent Pentecostal/Charismatic scholarship on Symeon is reviewed in the light of contemporary Orthodox scholarship. Four key moments in Symeon's teaching on asceticism are presented in response to two Pentecostal/Charismatic theologians.

Keywords: Symeon the New Theologian; Orthodox spirituality; Pentecostal/Charismatic spirituality; mysticism; asceticism; *apatheia*

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1. Introduction

Evangelical Christians have been interested in the history of the Early Church since the time of the formation of Evangelical churches themselves. It was only a question of time before Evangelical scholars would discover one of the logical ancillary areas associated with Early Christianity: patristic studies. While much of the attention of Evangelical scholars has been directed towards the Apostolic Fathers, Saint Augustine and the Fourth-Century Fathers, a recent interest in Saint Symeon the New Theologian (ca. 949–1022) can now be detected among Pentecostal/Charismatic theologians. This is a welcome development that should be acknowledged warmly by Orthodox theologians. In this article, I would like to recognize some of the work on Symeon by Pentecostal/Charismatic theologians and share some insights from modern Orthodox scholarship that might prove helpful to them in their ongoing reception of him. I would also like to point out some potential pitfalls.

My intention is not to analyze recent Orthodox scholarship in detail; instead, I propose to highlight important moments in that scholarship that give us keys to understanding Symeon. When placing the latter insights beside those of contemporary Pentecostal/Charismatic scholars, we notice right away the possibilities for further conversation. The conversation from the Pentecostal/Charismatic side has already begun. Now I believe it is time for Orthodox theologians to respond to Pentecostal/Charismatic theologians. As a modest beginning, I suggest four areas in Saint Symeon's teaching on asceticism for further consideration. The idea is to respond to Pentecostal/Charismatic theologians from within the work of Saint Symeon himself and engage in the conversation by explicating some of the salient points from the New Theologian's teaching on asceticism.

2. The Life and Witness of Saint Symeon

Saint Symeon the New Theologian was an Orthodox monk who lived in the tenth and eleventh centuries. He is called "Theologian" by the Church because of the profound knowledge and experience of God that can be observed in his life and writings. He is known as the "New Theologian" because he follows in the great tradition of Saint John the Apostle and Saint Gregory Nazianzen, who are also called "Theologians" by the Church.

While it is possible, and even likely, that the appelation *New* Theologian was attributed derisively to Saint Symeon by his opponents, the Orthodox Church rejoices in the title, knowing that the Church affirmed unreservedly both the holiness of the Saint and the orthodoxy of his teaching.

3. Historical Context

Several aspects of the society in which Saint Symeon was born and raised are important for understanding the development of his vocation and his emergence as one of the major monastic figures of his time. Symeon was born in an empire that had reached the peak of its political, economic, and cultural development. It was a Christianized empire in which both the emperor and the patriarch played very important parts. The relationship between the Church and the state and, more specifically, between the patriarch and the emperor is commonly described by the term *symphonia*. While this term is suggestive of a peaceful coexistence between Church and state, we must not ignore the fact that the two often held each other in check. Falling into disfavour with the patriarch, for example, might not be absolutely fatal if one had powerful friends at the imperial court. Such was in fact the case with Symeon, who was rescued by supporters who had great influence with the emperor during times when he faced the opposition of the patriarchal office (Golitzin 1997, p. 37).

The Byzantine empire of the time of Saint Symeon was, as we have noted, enjoying economic prosperity and some successes in its diplomatic policies, which were reflected in some brilliant advances in mission work and some victories on the battlefield. Symeon spent his youth and virtually his entire adult life in the capital of this empire, Constantinople. Even the time spent in exile by Symeon was lived just across the Bosphorus from the capital city. What is striking in him is the contrasting approaches he took to Constantinople and all that it symbolized: he both profoundly rejected and intentionally embraced the city. On one hand, Symeon passionately rejected a career of service to the state. Symeon's parents had sent him to Constantinople as a young boy with precisely such a career in mind. Symeon's entrance into the monastic life signals both his escape from the future his family had planned for him and a repudiation of what he no doubt saw as the more distasteful aspects of political life. On the other hand, Symeon is what Metropolitan Kallistos terms "an urban hesychast" (Ware 1986, p. 238). His was not the eremetical life of the desert or the idiorrhythmic life of the skete. There was nothing quiet or pastoral about the situation of Symeon's monastery; it was in the heart of the capital city of the empire. In this sense, Symeon projects the image of a cosmopolitan monk who is conversant with all of the issues of his day and acquainted with the most powerful figures in both the Church and the state. I do not in any sense believe that Symeon's theological positions were *determined* by his historical and geographical situation. It is easy to see, however, how his cosmopolitan character meshed very well with his theological conviction that a personal experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit and the practice of contemplative prayer were normative for the laity as well as the monks.

Father George Maloney, commenting on the monasticism of Symeon's day, refers to it as being in a state of decay:

> Eastern Christianity at this period of Byzantine political power had settled down into a "smug symphony" with the State. Byzantine monasticism had become ossified by institutionalizing its liturgical and contemplative forms of prayer. The *Typicon* regulating how many prayers and bows were to be performed by the monks had replaced the Holy Spirit. There was need, not for another St. Theodore the Studite to legislate for monasticism, but for a new Pentecost. The Byzantine Church was crying for a charismatic leader to bring Christians back to the living God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (Maloney 1975, p. 10)

No doubt Father Maloney is overstating his case somewhat. He also seems to forget that Saint Theodore the Studite brought true renewal to the monasticism of his time. More importantly, however, Father Maloney has introduced into the study of the life and work of Saint Symeon a specific historical narrative that poses certain risks. Ought we to see the

Studite tradition as ossified and Symeon as a charismatic reformer? Is Symeon rebelling against the Studite monasticism of his time? Is Symeon the representative of an older tradition that has been forgotten in 10th- and 11th-century Constantinople? It would be appealing to think so. Symeon's character certainly seems to reflect the personality of a charismatic reformer. Exciting as such a hypothesis would be, it is certainly not supported by current scholarship (McGuckin 1996).

Archbishop Alexander Golitzin presents us with a more sober assessment of Saint Symeon's historical context than does Father Maloney. Golitzin speaks of a golden age of the Christian empire that included a kind of golden age for monasticism (Golitzin 1997, p. 17). It is precisely because of this golden age that many of Symeon's contemporaries did not understand the prophetic nature of his ministry.

For the purposes of St. Symeon's life, it is sufficient here to underline the notes of triumphalism and conservatism which dominated the symphony of Church and state in the Byzantium of his day. His own melody would therefore strike many of his contemporaries as discordant, impossibly jarring, and perhaps heretical. He was faced with constant opposition. Others, however, would recognize in his song the strains of a tune that was older than Constantine's alliance of Church and state, one indeed coeval with the Christian gospel (ibid., pp. 17–18).

4. Different Interpretations in Secondary Literature

In virtually all of the contemporary scholarship on Saint Symeon, we find an attempt to discover the main influences on his thought. Many scholars emphasize the connection in terms of theological content and vision between Saint Symeon and Saint Makarios (Krivocheine 1986, p. 31; Ware 1986, p. 238). Both placed a great emphasis on the need for a personal experience of the action of the Holy Spirit. We also know from Symeon's *Life* by his disciple Nicetas Stethatos (ca. 1005–1090) that Symeon's elder, Saint Symeon the Pious, gave him Saint Mark the Ascetic to study in his younger years (Stethatos 2013, chp. 4, para. 2). At a later point in his life, Saint Symeon was studying the writings of Saint John Klimakos, and it seems that Saint Symeon took much from them in certain areas (ibid., chp. 6, para. 2). Some scholars refer to the marriage of cenobitic monasticism in the tradition of Saint Theodore the Studite and eremetical monasticism in the Sinaite tradition, a marriage that characterizes Saint Symeon's writings (Sylvia Mary 1976, p. 99; Ware 1986, p. 238). Since it is hard to determine all of the major patristic influences on Saint Symeon, it seems safer to follow the intuition expressed by Golitzin, who says quite simply that Saint Symeon is the inheritor of all the best in the Orthodox tradition and follows in the mainstream of the development of patristic theology exemplified by the dogmatic pronouncements of the Ecumenical Councils (Golitzin 1997, p. 11).

Modern scholarship also provides us with a variety of opinions regarding the theological orientation of Saint Symeon's work. Some, including Metropolitan Kallistos and Sister Sylvia Mary, find in Saint Symeon a profound Christological orientation (Ware 1986, p. 240; Sylvia Mary 1976, p. 98). Father Alexis Torrance not only ascribes a Christological character to Symeon's writings, but interprets them in an explicitly Chalcedonian/Neo-Chalcedonian framework (Torrance 2020, pp. 134–38). Vladimir Lossky, on the other hand, states that Saint Symeon's major contribution to Orthodox theology is more in the area of his Pneumatology (Lossky 1973, p. 117). Father Louis Bouyer perceives St. Symeon's writings to have both a strong Christological and Pneumatological character (Bouyer 1968, p. 568).

Orthodox scholarship on Symeon in the West began to develop more substantially after the works of Saint Symeon were published in a critical edition in *Sources Chrétiennes*. Archbishop Basil Krivocheine served as one of the editors of the *Sources Chrétiennes* volumes and was well placed to write a monograph on Saint Symeon that quickly became a classic in recent scholarship (Krivocheine 1986). The Archbishop, however, was unable to cover all of the aspects of Symeon's work in one volume. A second work on Symeon, designed explicitly as a sequel to Krivocheine's, emerged more than two decades later

(Alfeyev 2000). The former work positioned Symeon as a theologian, a mystic, and a Father. The latter placed Symeon even more firmly within the context of the patristic tradition. Subsequent Orthodox scholarship took exception to the notion that Symeon was either a radical reformer of monasticism or an inheritor of an identified spiritual tradition and approached Symeon as an eleventh-century Orthodox monk on his own terms and in his historical context (McGuckin 1996). In a book that appeared very recently in English, Orthodox theologian and priest Nikolaos Loudovikos sounds a note of caution regarding Symeon, warning against reading him as a mystic in the Origenistic-Augustinian tradition (Loudovikos 2019, p. 99). Loudovikos sees Symeon as a Father and considers him, together with Saints Maximos the Confessor and Gregory Palamas, as one of the three most significant architects of Orthodox Christian theology (ibid., pp. 264–65). His identifying Symeon as a Father is, of course, nothing new: Krivocheine and Alfeyev do the same. What is significant in Loudovikos's work, however, is the legacy he assigns to each of the three Fathers: Maximos, Symeon and Palamas (ibid., pp. 257–58).

In recent years, Saint Symeon has begun to attract the attention of Evangelical scholars, in particular those of the Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition. It is easy to understand why theologians of the Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition are attracted to Symeon the New Theologian. Symeon speaks about the need to experience the Holy Spirit consciously. He chastises those who teach that a Christian may have the Holy Spirit without having any awareness of it. He uses the expression "baptism in the Holy Spirit" and describes the latter as an experience that each Christian must choose and that is clearly one that occurs subsequent to the sacrament of Baptism. It would be easy to read the baptism in the Holy Spirit as a second experience of the grace of God and draw parallels with Wesleyan and Pentecostal/Charismatic teaching. Pentecostal/Charismatic theologians and writers have already noticed the potential parallels. In a book review in *The Pneuma Review,* Dony K. Donev writes concerning the three volumes published by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press *St. Symeon the New Theologian on the Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses*:

> The trilogy presents the New Theologian as new in name, but old in religion and original in the personal experience of God. This fact proves that through the ages, there have always been people searching for God with an open heart and experiencing His presence in a Pentecostal manner. It further defines the Pentecostal experience of the Spirit as the true restoration of the Early Church praxis. And finally, it proves that Land's thesis that Pentecostalism is more Orthodox than Catholic and more Eastern than Western. (Donev 2006)

Orthodox scholars may find the last statement particularly endearing. Pentecostal/Charismatic scholars are finding something immensely attractive in Saint Symeon and are making him a kind of link figure between the posited charismatic experience of the early Church and the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement of today. Donev refers to Stephen Jack Land, who wrote a recognized history of Pentecostal spirituality. Land, of course, is interested in locating important precursors of Pentecostal spirituality and finds them in the person of Symeon the New Theologian, as well as in Gregory of Nyssa and Macarius the Egyptian. He posits that Pentecostalism is more Eastern than Western in its spirituality and, very significantly, adopts *theosis* as a fundamental tenet of Pentecostal spirituality (Land 2010, p. 30). That Symeon is a theologian of the Holy Spirit *par excellence* is undeniable. That he insists on a personal appropriation of the work of the Holy Spirit is again more than evident in his writings. Is Symeon experiencing God's presence in a Pentecostal manner? Here I think we need to be cautious and give the question more consideration. Donev notes the importance of the sacraments in Symeon's writings but does not remark on the emphasis that the latter places on the Eucharist. For Symeon, the Eucharist is irreplaceable. In addition, Symeon emphasizes the role of asceticism in the Christian life. Donev does not mention asceticism at all, but I should point out that he is only writing a book review, not an analytic essay. In short, the ascetic and eucharistic context for Symeon's writings provides a specific framework for his experiences, and because of this framework, it would be difficult to make the claim that Symeon is having what modern-day Pente-

costals and Charismatic Christians would term a Pentecostal experience, or the baptism in the Holy Spirit, as they normally interpret it. I will return to the importance of asceticism and the Eucharist in Symeon's writings later. Clearly, however, there is an opening for dialogue between Orthodox and Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians on this particular issue, and given the openness of the latter to the discovery of a significant Pneumatology in the Christian East, it is an opportunity that should not be missed.

In another article published in *The Pneuma Review*, republished from the *Quodlibet Journal*, author Gene Mills makes the connection between the two baptisms in the Pentecostal tradition and the two in the work of Saint Symeon (Mills 2019, p. 1). In the case of the latter, Mills identifies the baptisms as the sacramental Baptism (combined with Chrismation in the Eastern Christian tradition), administered by Symeon's time in infancy, and the baptism of tears, a spiritual baptism of purification that is received later, and only with the express desire of the recipient (ibid., pp. 1–3). Mills does not state explicitly what the two baptisms are in the Pentecostal tradition, but we are left to infer that they must be Baptism in water after conversion and the baptism in the Holy Spirit at a later juncture. Mills posits that the teaching on two baptisms is a hallmark of Pentecostalism and finds what he considers a parallel tradition in the theological work of the New Theologian (ibid., p. 4). It is an intriguing point of departure, especially given that the Pentecostal tradition is not normally considered sacramental. If we set the question of the first, or sacramental, Baptism aside for the moment, we are left with the opinion of the author that the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the Pentecostal/Charismatic experience and the baptism of tears (also called baptism of the Holy Spirit—Symeon uses both expressions) in the writings of the New Theologian are analogous. Mills' assertion is very close to the hypothesis advanced by Donev that the Pentecostal experience runs through the entire history of the Church.

Mills takes seriously Symeon's conviction that Baptism performed in infancy is efficacious. He also places Symeon's teaching on the two baptisms into a larger narrative on deification (ibid., p. 1). What is curious, however, is the author's contention that Symeon's position on the sacrament of Baptism celebrated in infancy accurately reflects the teaching of the Orthodox Church but that the Saint's position on the baptism of tears represents a fundamental departure from it (ibid., p. 3). In a footnote, he concedes that the teaching on the baptism of tears can be found in patristic spiritual literature and identifies the standard antecedents in the tradition (ibid., p. 5, n. 14). I would suggest that this is an overstatement on the part of the author. Symeon's teaching on the baptism of tears is part of the overarching theme of repentance in his writings. Father John McGuckin argues convincingly that repentance is indeed the key for understanding Symeon's theological work (McGuckin 2020). Symeon distinguishes himself in the tradition by expressing his position with great conviction and by insisting that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a *sine qua non* for all Christians, but if we understand the baptism as purification, we do not find an innovation here. Mills understands the importance of repentance in Symeon's writings and links it with *penthos* (Mills 2019, p. 3), but he does not seem to position Symeon firmly in the existing tradition on the point of the baptism of tears.

Finally, Mills criticizes Symeon for locating his understanding of holiness within asceticism:

> Symeon was inescapably bound to his context, and as such, he found holiness only in the extreme asceticism of the monastic life. This is neither practical, nor desirable, for most Christians today. Yet can this also be one of the loudest clarion calls Symeon has for us? Could it be that we have complicated our lives to the point that we have made any concept of *theosis* an impossibility without such a radical change in lifestyle? (ibid., p. 4)

I can understand that Mills finds asceticism as it is described in patristic texts alien to his own tradition. Later in this article, I will attempt to describe the dynamics of asceticism in Symeon's writings. I believe that Mills and other theologians of the Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition can find much of benefit in Symeon's teachings on this topic and even some things that might be familiar. What will become apparent, however, is that

Symeon does not locate asceticism in monastic practice exclusively. As for Symeon being bound to his context, I can hardly see this aspect of his thinking as problematic. Indeed, what historical figure is not connected to a historical context? Good scholarship on Symeon will take precisely this context into account in order to get a proper understanding of him.

Recently, a monograph on Saint Symeon the New Theologian written by a theologian from the Charismatic tradition appeared in print and significantly advanced Pentecostal/Charismatic scholarship on Symeon. The book *The Immediacy of God in Symeon the New Theologian* demonstrates a sympathetic approach to the New Theologian. The study on Symeon, a revision of the author's Master's thesis (McInnes 2017, p. ix), is well documented and offers some good insights into Symeon's work. To an even greater extent, however, the book will serve as a scholarly introduction to Symeon for Evangelicals, particularly those of the Pentecostal/Charismatic persuasion. The author, Jim McInnes, is well acquainted with Orthodox scholarship on Symeon and has obviously made a serious and laudable effort to gain a fundamental grasp of Orthodox theology. McInnes summarizes Symeon's teaching in this way:

> The baptism of repentance with tears brought cleansing to the soul enabling it to see God. Deification by means of the Spirit through the Eucharist is essentially the same process, which is why Symeon stressed the importance of tears and conscious awareness of Christ while participating in communion. It is all of a piece. Both sacraments—Baptism and Eucharist—demand the same true knowledge, experience and contemplation that were earlier equated with participation in God. (ibid., p. 154)

McInnes grounds Symeon's teaching very appropriately, in my view, in the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. The Christian life begins with Baptism and finds its perfection in the Eucharist. Repentance and purification enable deification to take place. Symeon states that every Christian must be aware of the process to be a true participant in it. This simple but accurate summary of Symeon's teaching provides the correct framework for interpreting everything else. If the author had simply followed through on this summary by using it as a hermeneutic for interpreting the "mystical" passages in Symeon, his book would have been even stronger, in my view. The problem begins when Symeon is interpreted as a mystic first and then his teaching is analyzed later, often in a way to support the initial assumption. McInnes, however, is entirely aware of the problem, and observes that the most recent scholarship on Symeon addresses the earlier imbalance of seeing Symeon as a mystic to the exclusion of everything else (ibid., p. 11). Here is where Orthodox scholarship can help. It is developing in the same direction, addressing Symeon as a Father of the Church first and foremost, or as a spiritually gifted eleventh-century monk who assumed charismatic authority from his spiritual father. Both approaches have their strengths and bring something important to contemporary scholarship, although I feel that the former better places Symeon in the context of the tradition as a *theologian*.

McInnes's thesis, of course, is that Symeon's teaching is characterized by an emphasis on the immediacy of God, hence the title of the book. The expression "immediacy of God," however, seems to be used synonymously with mysticism, so we are back into the pursuit of Symeon as a mystic in one way or another. As McInnes himself states:

> A study of the immediacy of God is, after all, a study of mysticism, not monasticism, or asceticism, or history, or theology, as important as these lenses are for making sense of our tenth-century Byzantine monk. (ibid., p. 172)

The author's approach certainly does not invalidate his research but, in my opinion, it places certain restrictions on how far he can go with certain good intuitions that he has. For example, the author well understands Symeon's great emphasis on the importance of the Eucharist. He devotes a section to it and makes the connection with the Incarnation in Symeon's theological work (ibid., pp. 148–55). Nevertheless, he does not make the Eucharist the perfecting event that it is in Symeon's writings, the event that conditions all his mystical teaching. Not surprisingly, he therefore evaluates visions, voices, and

ecstatic encounters as phenomena (ibid., p. 173). He quite understandably explores vision, conscious awareness, mystical experience of light, and receptivity to mystical grace as moments of mystical experience (ibid., pp. 172–98). We can hardly fault the author for doing so: his is the standard approach to mysticism that we can see in many academic studies among theologians and students of spirituality.[1] The study of mysticism thus becomes a precise science, and with the scientific analysis of it, academics can undertake to construct its history and explain its standard characteristics. While there is some truth in this approach, it may not actually tell us fully who Symeon is. Instead, it may obscure important elements of his teaching and remove him from his place in the tradition.

One of the most challenging and even perilous moments to interpret in Symeon's writings are his visions. While McInnes describes the two visions of Christ that we find clearly presented in Symeon's work, one before and the other after the Saint entered the monastic life (ibid., pp. 35–42), he notes that a distinction needs to be made between ecstatic states and regular, continuing visionary revelation (ibid., 192). The author poses the question of whether Symeon had a visible radiance and comes to the conclusion that he did not (ibid., p. 189). Perhaps an important question is: Visible to whom? Apart from this particular question, an answer needs to be given regarding the meaning of vision. Father John McGuckin explores this question in great detail in the article that McInnes indicates he was unable to obtain (ibid., p. 11, n. 29). In this article, McGuckin, an Orthodox theologian, applies insights of historical criticism to Symeon's vision texts (McGuckin 1997). McGuckin opines that many theologians have applied a Transfigurationist hermeneutic to the visions in order to connect them with the teaching of classical hesychasm, a teaching that would only emerge fully in the fourteenth century (ibid., pp. 94–97). He opposes this approach and finds instead that the visions are a way to message repentance (ibid., pp. 102–7). One may dispute the utility of historical criticism as a method in this instance, and one may also agree or disagree with McGuckin's contention that the visions message repentance, but what is most important in the article, in my opinion, is McGuckin's insistence on moving the discussion of the visions outside of the presumed context of mystical experiences in the usual sense imputed to them by many scholars.

McInnes cites Lossky on numerous occasions and observes that Lossky understands vision as referring to an existential communion (McInnes 2017, p. 180). Here is an important key provided by Lossky: the visions need to be understood as part of the Christian life and not simply as isolated ecstatic experiences. Perhaps we might reposition the visions in this new context supplied by Lossky and draw the conclusion that the visions are an expression of the union of the created with the uncreated, a union or communion that might properly be termed Christification.

McInnes observes that asceticism in Symeon's thought leads to dispassion and purification to illumination (ibid., pp. 105–6). Here is where we can incorporate the insights of Father Nikolaos Loudovikos, who indicates that mysticism and spirituality are potentially dangerous categories for theology. Specifically, he identifies a stream of mysticism originating in the Christian tradition with Origen and continuing through Augustine to Nietzsche. He eschews the illumination of the Augustinian school and warns of an ontology of power implicit in much of western mysticism (ibid., pp. 28–62).[2] Furthermore, he contends that hesychasm is also being misread through this same Augustinian lens (ibid., pp. 3–4). Loudovikos identifies the Augustinian understanding of illumination as a prominent feature of this pernicious mysticism. In his most recent publication in English, Loudovikos dedicates a substantial chapter to Saint Symeon. Here is what he has to say about the vision of God in Symeon:

> In the most profound Christocentric thought of Saint Symeon, the Eucharistic indwelling of the incarnate Word as Light is knowledge, as a conjunction of love and vision, repentance and illumination. In this sense, the vision of God means the manifestation of Christ as the supreme, self-emptying encounter between persons and not any Neo-Platonic enlightenment and mystic subjectivism. (ibid., p. 112)

I hasten to point out that I do not believe that McInnes understands the vision of God in Symeon as Neoplatonic illumination. My intention, rather, is to indicate the risk involved in treating the visions as an aspect of mystical experience. In addition, we can see from Loudovikos what a central role the Eucharist plays in Symeon's thought, and I would suggest that the Eucharist, not mysticism, is the key for understanding Symeon.

As I indicated earlier, I would like to return to the question of asceticism in Symeon's thought. I believe that there are two important moments in his thought that could prove beneficial to Mills in his exploration of Symeon's corpus of writings and two that might prove helpful to McInnes. For Mills, the two moments that I believe would serve to make his study more complete are the positive character of asceticism in Symeon's work and the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a purgative experience. For McInnes, the two moments are the importance of the body and alleged lapses into Neoplatonic thinking in Symeon, as well as the acquisition of virtues and *apatheia* as a dynamic process.

5. The Positive Character of Asceticism

In his Seventh Ethical Discourse, Saint Symeon tackles the question of the character of asceticism using a verse from the Gospel of Luke as a point of departure. Symeon's position is simple: asceticism must be more than cutting off the passions. The verse he uses is Luke 11:23, "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters" (Symeon the New Theologian 1996, Seventh Ethical Discourse, p. 84). "Gathering" in this case means acquiring virtues, and Symeon insists that the one who is not actively acquiring is in fact moving backwards in the spiritual life (ibid.). The stress here is on a positive activity that passes beyond the avoidance of sin. In the spiritual life, the removal of sinful thoughts and actions must be linked with the emergence of virtue. This is a feature of Symeon's thought that McInnes highlights in his book (McInnes 2017, p. 107). Mills, on the other hand, does not seem to engage with this positive aspect of Symeon's asceticism.

In the same discourse, Symeon also deals with the question of the purpose of asceticism. He is emphatic in stating that ascetic acts are not a service to God (Symeon the New Theologian 1996, Seventh Ethical Discourse, p. 86). We practise asceticism out of concern for ourselves and for our own salvation (ibid.). It is likely that Saint Symeon was aware of the destructive impact that a wrong view of asceticism could have on the life of his own monastery and that he spoke out of concern for the health of his own monastic community. He wanted to make very sure that asceticism did not surreptitiously become the goal of the Christian life. If God were to be served by asceticism, the latter would become the objective rather than a means of the spiritual life. Here Evangelicals can rest assured that asceticism is not a "work" apart from or in place of the grace of God. Instead, asceticism represents the practice of spiritual disciplines that serve to make us more open to the grace of God. God gives His grace freely, but our openness to that grace is often limited or compromised due to our own woundedness or inattentiveness. Ascetic disciplines help us increase our availability to God and assist us in apprehending the grace that He grants us. I suspect that Mills could find something familiar and useful in Symeon's teaching for his own tradition. Not everything from the monastic tradition is "extreme" or disconnected from the current context for Christians.

6. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit Is Purgative

Saint Symeon discusses the way in which the Holy Spirit manifests Himself in the life of a Christian. In the first place, the entrance of the Holy Spirit into the life of a believer is contingent upon the will and desire of the Christian (p. 98). Clearly, one of the objectives of asceticism is to provide this desire for and openness to the Holy Spirit. Next, Symeon says, the fire of the Holy Spirit is ignited, and the Christian is completely engulfed in it. This, he says, is not without "unbearable pain" (p. 99). The pain is the result of all of the sins and their effects being burned out of the person of the Christian. This is what we might call the "purgatory" of Saint Symeon's spiritual theology: it is part of the ascetic life in *this* world. Beyond the purgative stage, we discover the experience of great light and joy (ibid.).

Through this immersion in the Holy Spirit, the Christian gains a much deeper awareness of sin (ibid.). The basic principle that Symeon is establishing here is that the ability to see one's sins is preceded by purification from sin. This might strike many as peculiar, but the point of this teaching is that we must receive a certain degree of healing before we become properly conscious of our own illness. The human being without the Holy Spirit is so desperately ill that he or she cannot even clearly reflect on his or her own condition. A little progress in the spiritual life finally allows the person to see his or her own state for what it is. Evangelicals of the Wesleyan tradition will find something familiar here, as will those of the Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition. Wesley was known to have read spiritual masters of the Christian East and to have found much of value in them. It would be oversimplifying to state that Saint Symeon, Wesley, and contemporary Pentecostals/Charismatics are saying the same thing, but there are some points of intersection. The baptism in the Holy Spirit in Symeon's theological thought is purgative but results in deeper joy and peace. There may be parallels between the New Theologian's baptism in the Holy Spirit and John Wesley's second work of grace, and they are worth exploring, but they are not directly germane to our discussion of asceticism here. It seems clear, however, that we cannot associate the baptism in the Holy Spirit in Saint Symeon with the baptism of the Holy Spirit with *glossolalia* as evidence in the Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition. Mills seems well aware of that and proposes that speaking in tongues not be the only sign of the presence of the Spirit. He sees the baptism of tears as being another legitimate indication of the advent of the Spirit (Mills 2019, p. 5, n. 23).

7. The Importance of the Body in Asceticism and the Alleged Lapses into Neoplatonism

McInnes states that "Symeon sometimes treats the body as a material prison from which the immaterial soul only finds a kind of Platonic salvation through departure" (McInnes 2017, p. 136). He continues: "Consider, for example, his comment that believers are currently deprived of union with God 'because they are held by the body, and sheltered, and covered, alas, like prisoners under guard . . . for they cannot strip off the shackles of the body.' Here McInnes is citing a phrase from Symeon's Hymn 27, but he has stopped the citation too early. Here is the rest of the sentence: "Even if they are set free of the passions and every attraction, but having been set free of many passions, they are held by one" (Symeon the New Theologian 2010, Hymn 27, lines 106–107). Here is the critical point: even one passion can render the body a prison of sorts. Symeon continues:

> For one who has been bound in many fetters does not hope to find release from the many, but one who has been able to cut through most of the fetters, but remains held by one, is more distressed than the others, and is eager, and always seeks release from it, in order to appear free, to walk rejoicing, so to go in haste towards their desire, on this account one seeks deliverance from this fetter. Accordingly, let us all seek Him who alone is able to free us from the fetters! (ibid., lines 108–117)

Do the fetters represent the body? Clearly not! They represent the passions. Symeon is saying that the awareness of imprisonment by the passions becomes more acute in those who are freed from them almost entirely. They long to put off their last fetter in order to be fully free. It is not the release from the body that they are seeking; it is the release from the oppressive passions that render life in the body a prison.[3]

When Saint Symeon speaks of the soul's being set afire with the Holy Spirit, he is careful to add that the body may also participate in the same experience and reality:

After these things have been utterly destroyed and the essence alone of the soul remains, quite without passion, then the divine and immaterial fire unites itself essentially to the soul, too, and the latter is immediately kindled and becomes transparent, and shares in it like the clay pot does in the visible fire. So, too, with the body. It, too, becomes fire through participation in the divine and ineffable light. (Symeon the New Theologian 1996, Seventh Ethical Discourse, p. 99).

Here Symeon gives us an unmistakable indication of the high regard he has for the body in his theological anthropology. He stands apart from that stream of spirituality that is highly influenced by Neoplatonism. For Symeon, the body is neither a prison nor an encumbrance, but an essential part of the human person that participates equally with the soul in the full experience of the divine presence. The reader must keep in mind this tenet of Symeon's theological anthropology in order to properly understand other references in his writings that appear more ambiguous. An example of this apparent ambiguity follows:

> We sleep on the ground, and many of us bind our bodies with iron chains. Why? In order, of course, to break this lusty body and weigh it down and not allow it . . . to drag itself and the intellect which rides it . . . into the abyss of damnation and everlasting fire. (ibid., p. 89)

The above passage could be disturbing if one had no means to interpret it. The reference to "weighing the body down" might appear to offer more than a hint of Neoplatonism. Additionally, Symeon does not speak disapprovingly of monks binding their bodies with iron chains. Nevertheless, he is very clear in stating the purpose of these disciplines: it is to prevent the flesh from taking control of the entire human person. Most importantly, it is the *lusty* body that must be broken, not the body cured from the passions. Monks historically have been given to rather extreme forms of asceticism from time to time, although the expressions of ascetic discipline in Symeon's monastery and time would doubtless have been more moderate than certain practices that can be observed in early monasticism. When passages referring to such ascetic practices are seen through the lens of Symeon's theological anthropology, however, they take on a new and different meaning. The genius of Symeon's anthropology is that it allows monasticism to retain the full rigour of its ascetic tradition within the context of a Christian view of the human body. Here we find a way for Christians from the Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition to put otherwise difficult passages from ascetic literature into a proper theological context.

8. Acquisition of Virtues and *Apatheia* as a Dynamic Process

McInnes states that asceticism in Symeon leads to dispassion (*apatheia*) (McInnes 2017, p. 106). He also observes that passions must be rehabilitated in order for virtues to be acquired (ibid., p. 107). There is, however, a dynamic acquisition of the virtues in Symeon's work that leads upwards to the acquisition of *apatheia*. Even *apatheia*, however, should not be understood as a static state. Critically, the ascetic ascent ends with a personal encounter with Christ. It is communion with Christ that gives the fullest meaning to asceticism.

In the Eleventh Ethical Discourse, Saint Symeon writes: "God has arranged for everything to be in order and by degrees. Indeed, just as islands in the deeps of the sea, so should you picture with your mind the virtues to be in the midst of this life" (Symeon the New Theologian 1996, Eleventh Ethical Discourse, p. 132). Symeon argues that there is a certain progression or growth in the virtues and that each degree opens up the next level. He does state, however, that a certain precondition is required before the journey through the virtues can even be started. This precondition is the giving of our life. Symeon states that the virtues must be purchased with our blood (ibid., p. 131). A refusal to die means that no progress in the virtues is made: "Truly, unless one is slaughtered like a sheep for any single virtue and pours out his own blood for it, he will never possess it. God has so ordered it that we receive eternal life by means of our voluntary death" (ibid.).

Saint Symeon understands humility to be the gateway to all the other virtues (ibid.). Without it, none of the other virtues can be attained. After humility, Symeon lists mourning, then meekness, then hunger and thirst for righteousness, then mercy and compassion, then purity, and finally, the vision of God (p. 132). Symeon, it seems, took the Beatitudes as his inspiration for the degrees of virtue. He makes a very important addition to this schema: the condescension of Christ. Symeon writes: "If we ascend just a little at the beginning of the ascetic journey, Christ condescends to meet us" (pp. 133–34). Here the Saint is stressing that the final end of asceticism is an encounter with Christ. The idea of progression from

virtue to virtue is a completely biblical one that finds its model in the Second Epistle of Saint Peter (2 Peter 1: 3–9).

9. Degrees of *Apatheia*

Progression along the pathway of the virtues leads to higher and higher degrees of *apatheia* or dispassion. Saint Symeon even suggests that there are different degrees here (Symeon the New Theologian 1996, Fourth Ethical Discourse, p. 15). He speaks of the *apatheia* required to forgive completely those who have wounded us and "to embrace them dispassionately as true friends without the least trace of dislike making its nest in the soul" (ibid.). An even higher level of dispassion is displayed by the person who maintains this level of spiritual composure in the midst of temptation when he or she is being insulted and hurt by other people. Symeon pushes the point further, however, in suggesting that there is a yet higher level of *apatheia*:

> I am also of the opinion that there is a stage yet incomparably higher than the last: to have arrived at complete forgetfulness of whatever it is one may have suffered and never to recall it, whether those who have done the injury are present or not, and, in addition, to behave toward these people, whether in conversation or at table, as toward friends, without having any second thoughts. These are the works of men who walk in the light. (pp. 15–16)

What is striking about the highest degree of dispassion described by Symeon is that it is clearly beyond the normal capability of even the least self-centred person. This type of *apatheia* is not a learned skill and cannot be achieved through the simple imitation of Christ's behaviour as described in the Gospels. *Apatheia* is not merely the highest possible level of consciousness that can be achieved by an ascetic; it is nothing less than the fullness of Christ's life made real in a human person.

10. Asceticism as a Means, Not an End

Saint Symeon understands asceticism to be an indispensable part of the life of a Christian. At the same time, he is equally aware that it is a means, or better yet, a path to the true objective of the Christian life, which is both the immersion in the Holy Spirit and a direct encounter with Christ. Symeon's writings are equally Pneumatocentric and Christocentric. A high degree of *apatheia* characterizes the advanced stages of the ascetic life. *Apatheia* on its own, however, is not properly speaking the objective of asceticism; rather, it is a way for us to describe the existential state of a person who has reached full communion with Christ, or *theosis.* Symeon describes this in another way by using the expression "wholly with God" (p. 32). While *theosis* is a term that would not be embraced by all Evangelical theologians, "wholly with God" is a state that all Evangelicals could accept wholeheartedly.

In the Fourth Ethical Discourse, Saint Symeon insists that the profound transparency to Christ that typifies the highest level of *apatheia* is possible in this life. He is able to make this claim because he experienced it in his own life (p. 41). It is his own experience, which is either articulated explicitly in his work or is implicit in many of his teachings, that makes what he has to say about the ascetic life so credible and so attractive. Symeon becomes the guide who can initiate the Christian into the spiritual life, the theologian who can give the spiritual life its deepest meaning, and the master who can lead his disciple to the spiritual heights.

11. Conclusions

The purpose of this article was threefold: (1) to note key moments in contemporary Orthodox scholarship on Symeon; (2) to recognize contemporary Pentecostal/Charismatic scholarship in the light of the latter; and (3) to begin a conversation based on four salient points in the New Theologian's teaching on asceticism. Contemporary Orthodox scholarship on Saint Symeon the New Theologian is resistant to the idea of approaching Symeon as a charismatic reformer, cautious and occasionally openly opposed to viewing him as

a mystic, and much inclined, of course, to receive him as a Father. The latter point is a rather important one for Orthodox theologians. Pentecostal/Charismatic scholarship finds Symeon extremely attractive, ponders the possibility of seeking spiritual and theological roots in the Christian East, and is much less resistant to viewing Symeon as a mystic. For reasons that are understandable, Pentecostal/Charismatic theologians may not feel the need to pose the question about the reception of Saint Symeon as a Father. This kind of comparison is useful in theology because it allows us immediately to see divergences and convergences. In this article, I have endeavoured to observe these moments without making any attempt to create them. Pentecostal/Charismatic theologians and Orthodox theologians come from different theological traditions, so divergences are entirely natural. At the same time, I have tried to highlight some convergences that might come as a surprise to Orthodox theologians: the deep interest of Pentecostal/Charismatic theologians in Orthodox Pneumatology, their proposal to relocate themselves "Eastward" with regard to the patristic teaching on *theosis*, and the beginning of an effort to appreciate the importance of the sacraments and the ascetic life. I must admit to not having been aware of these moments until I read the work of the Pentecostal/Charismatic theologians featured in this article. I think that most Orthodox theologians would have predicted an interest on the part of Pentecostal/Charismatic theologians only in Symeon's teaching on the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We see, however, that the situation is quite different.

In my view, the logical place for a conversation to start is with the New Theologian's teaching on the ascetic life. In his discussions on asceticism, Symeon broadly combines theological anthropology, Christology, and eschatology, providing an excellent synthesis of his teaching. He links asceticism to *theosis*, and having discovered Land's assertion that Pentecostal spirituality is partially aligned with Orthodox theology on this point (Land 2010), I became convinced of the wisdom of using the Saint's teaching on asceticism as a basis for initiating a conversation. For these reasons, I responded to Mills by suggesting two moments and to McInnes with two moments. Each of the moments was chosen in response to the individual author's work. For Mills, Symeon's stress on the positive aspect of asceticism allows the author to see Christian asceticism as something current and relevant, a necessary part of discipleship that stretches beyond the confines of eleventh-century monasticism. Confronting the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a purgative experience would allow the theologian and author to pursue further study of this "second" baptism within the resources of his own tradition while maintaining an awareness of some of the potential divergences between the Orthodox and Pentecostal/Charismatic traditions on this point. When I came to McInnes, I understood the substantial commitment that he had made to researching Symeon's works on the academic level. I suggest two moments that would allow for greater theological definition. The first one, that Saint Symeon is firmly committed to a Christian understanding of the body despite language that sometimes suggests an intrusion of Neoplatonism, may sound like an overly arcane point, unworthy of further consideration. I was inspired, however, by Father Alexis Torrance's approach to Symeon as a Chalcedonian and Neo-Chalcedonian thinker (Torrance 2020). If Torrance is right, Symeon could not embrace Neoplatonic thought to any significant degree. McInnes has done his research on this point and is fully aware of how different scholars align themselves. As for the dynamic nature of the acquisition of virtues and *apatheia* in Saint Symeon, it is a beautiful moment in Symeon's thought, one that links the acquisition of *apatheia* to Christification. This moment in Symeon's teaching provides a fine complement to McInnes's work and an important reminder of the New Theologian's enduring commitment to the possibility, and indeed necessity, of attaining *theosis* in this life, a hallmark of his teaching.

The reception of Symeon by Pentecostal/Charismatic theologians is only beginning. It will no doubt provide a fertile ground for exchange. We can only look forward to the work that will be done in the future.

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Notes

[1] Some classic studies of Christian mysticism include Evelyn Underhill's Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness (Underhill 1911), Dom Cuthbert Butler's Western Mysticism: The Teaching of Augustine, Gregory and Bernard on Contemplation and the Contemplative Life (Butler 1922), and Bernard McGinn's monumental series The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism (McGinn 1991). While few would question the possibility of studying mysticism and especially of writing its history, Orthodox theologians see all theology as spiritual and sense a danger in allowing spirituality to become a phenomenon of its own, detached from the classic Christian teaching about the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Christ. See Loudovikos's comment "Christ did away with 'spirituality' through the Incarnation, putting in its place God as Man" (Loudovikos 2019, p. 4). Alexander Schmemann, a noted Orthodox liturgical theologian of the previous generation, expressed similar reservations in his book on Baptism and Chrismation (Schmemann 1974, pp. 72–74). He connects the spiritual life with Baptism, Chrismation, and the Eucharist. Giorgios Mantzarides states that "Spirituality is an abstract concept which has no place in the tradition of the Orthodox Church" (Mantzarides 1994, p. 8). Not all Orthodox scholars, however, subscribe to the aforementioned position; some use the terms 'spirituality' and 'mysticism' within an established framework. See, for example, Nicholas Arseniev's work on mysticism in the Eastern Church, a work that ends with a chapter on ecclesial mysticism based on the Eucharist (Arseniev 1979, pp. 120–47). Lossky also uses the terms 'mysticism' and 'spirituality' without difficulty, although he is careful to link the latter with the dogmatic tradition of the Church (Lossky 1976, pp. 9–11).

[2] Loudovikos indicates that the intellect is the highest aspect of the soul in Augustinian thought. The will, however, makes the intellect ecstatic, allowing the latter to project itself toward the divine light or, as Loudovikos observes, to assert itself over what is not considered truly spiritual by Augustine, including the body. Loudovikos notes that it is here, among other places, that Augustinian thought betrays its Neoplatonic origins. The soul is seen to be superior to the body and as possessing a spark of the divine. The movement of the intellect made ecstatic by the will is not, in Loudovikos's opinion, a movement towards incorporation into Christ, God made Man, but rather an aggressive movement that demonstrates the ontology of power. Loudovikos considers that the ontology of power lies behind much of what is usually considered mysticism and spirituality and that it reaches its apogee in Nietzsche's nihilism. Perhaps some will not accept the assertion that Nietzsche's *Übermensch* derives spiritually from Augustine and that Nietzsche is an inheritor of what Loudovikos terms Augustinian spiritualism; however, the critique of Augustine's theological anthropology and the associated implications for the spiritual life need to be given serious consideration. Loudovikos is likely not the first contemporary Orthodox theologian to critique Augustine and to make the connection to Nietzsche's philosophy of the will. It seems that Metropolitan John Zizioulas developed this idea earlier (Zizioulas 2006, pp. 46–47). While Loudovikos follows in part the contours of Zizioulas's argument, his critique expands beyond the question of consciousness and the will treated by Zizioulas and embraces virtually all aspects of theological anthropology.

[3] Passions are God-given natural energies that have been corrupted by sin. They need to be cured and rehabilitated through life in Christ. While the body can be afflicted by passions, it is inherently good. We must be careful to distinguish between the disease and the afflicted organism. Discussion of the passions and their treatment or rehabilitation has a long history in the patristic and early Christian tradition reaching back to Origen and Evagrios, continuing through Saint Maximos the Confessor and Saint John of the Ladder, and reaching a moment of refined articulation in the great Hesychast Fathers Saint Gregory of Sinai, Saint Gregory Palamas, and their successors. For a magisterial work on passions and their treatment, published in three volumes in English, see Dr. Jean-Claude Larchet's *Therapy of Spiritual Illnesses: An Introduction to the Ascetic Tradition of the Orthodox Church* (Larchet 2012).

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Article

Mariology, Anthropology, Synergy and Grace: Why Is Luther So Far Apart from Cabasilas?

Panagiotis Kantartzis

Faculty of Theology, Greek Bible College, 19009 Athens, Greece; contact@grbc.gr

Abstract: The issue of "Mariology" is one that divides the Eastern Orthodox and the Evangelical Christians. In this paper we are approaching the issue through the juxtaposition and comparison of the three Mariological sermons of Nicholas Cabasilas, on the one hand, with Martin Luther's Commentary on the Magnificat, on the other. The study of the two works side by side will bring to surface the theological presuppositions which explain the differences between the Eastern Orthodox and the Evangelical views. It will also help us identify some key points that need further discussion and clarification but also ways to reach a point of mutual agreement and understanding.

Keywords: Cabasilas; Luther; Mariology; Magnificat; Eastern Orthodox theology

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1. Introduction

A point of agreement between Orthodox and Protestants is the Christological basis of the understanding of Virgin Mary as *Theotokos*. As long as "Mariology is an extension of Christology" (Ware 1997, p. 258) both have a common ground for dialogue and accord. There are, however, several other aspects related to the Orthodox understanding of the Virgin's role in the divine economy that raise concerns and in some cases even cause for strong disagreement. One such aspect is what we may call "a synergistic anthropology" which, for many Orthodox theologians, is supported by their understanding of Mary's designation as *Panagia*, the All-Holy one. So, Kallistos Ware (1997) comments that the Orthodox Christians honor Mary not only because she is *Theotokos*, but also because she is *Panagia*. As such, "she is the supreme example of synergy or co-operation between the purpose of the deity and human freedom" (ibid.). Staniloae explains further that "she was able, through her purity, to bring a contribution to the Incarnation of the Son of God as man" (Staniloae 2013, p. 68), as she alone actualized a power that God planted from the beginning in humans to fight against sin. The divine economy for the Incarnation therefore "is not a unilateral one" (Lossky 1974, p. 202). Mary is the "summit" of a long process of Old Testament holiness as Wisdom "was building her house" through the generations of the Old Testament righteous men (ibid.). Through her purity the Word of God will become incarnate as "alongside the incarnate divine hypostasis there is a deified human hypostasis" (ibid., p. 208). A really intriguing observation is that all three theologians we have quoted above make reference to Cabasilas' three Mariological homilies in order to support their understanding of Mary as the supreme example of synergy between God and humans in the process of salvation.

A more detailed exposition of the theme of synergy, as it relates to the Holy Virgin, can be found in Tsirpanlis' article on the Mariology of Nicholas Cabasilas (Tsirpanlis 1979). In his analysis, Tsirpanlis expounds Cabasilas' Mariological homilies underlining therein the centrality of the concept of synergy. Specifically, he finds that Mary's achievement is presented "as an optimistic message and source of power, blessing and joy to anyone who struggles for *theosis* or divinization, i.e., restoration of the original human nature and its union with God." (ibid., p. 89). He explains further, that this teaching is part of a broader theological project that took place during the time of late Byzantine Christianity, a project he calls "Mariocentric humanism and anthropocentric Christology" (ibid.). In

a recent article Nicholaos Loudovikos makes the same point, proposing that Cabasilas' homilies present us with what he calls "Hesychastic Mariological Humanism", which has at its center the concept of synergy. Loudovikos quotes Cabasilas' statement from his homily *On the Theotokos' Birth* where he writes that Mary "helped God to show his goodness" and makes the comment, "here we see this deep understanding of synergy . . . based precisely upon the integrity of the divine image in man, an image which is precisely *freedom*." (Loudovikos 2016, p. 65). Both Loudovikos and Tsirpanlis follow Nellas (2010, pp. 13, 34) emphatic claim that Cabasilas' Mariology is a theological response aiming to address the rise of western humanism. Cabasilas' work understood against the background of the autonomous anthropology formulated in the West is considered, therefore, to be the counterproposal of an alternative, theocentric humanism in which humanity is glorified by the concepts of participation in God and synergy with God. For all these theologians therefore, in Mariology, especially as it is expressed in Cabasilas, we find "an anthropological *Leitmotif*" (Lossky 1974, p. 195), an affirmation of human capacity through the notion of synergy.

Martin Luther comes onto the scene almost two centuries after Cabasilas in a context quite different to the late Byzantine period. Nevertheless, it can be argued that he operates within the same philosophical milieu as Cabasilas. For example, Luther's first written work was a commentary on Lombard's *Sentences*. Interestingly enough, we have good reason to believe that Cabasilas knew and used this work in his own theological reflection (Kappes 2017)[1]. Notger Slenczka (2014) notes that Luther develops his anthropology against the background of classical scholastic humanism (Robert Kolb 2009, pp. 24–25, 37–39, 77, 95; Janz 2015; Oberman 1963) in much the same way as we have already seen that Cabasilas does his. Luther's anthropological thought is systematically presented in his *Disputatio de homine* (Luther 1960, pp. 137–44). The first set of theses (theses 1–19) of this work concern insights into the meaning of humanity as provided by philosophy. In the rest of the theses (theses 20–40) he provides a theological response and definition of the meaning of being human. Two of them are of extreme importance. Thesis 24 argues that even the most beautiful and magnificent thing, namely reason, "lies under sin and in the devil's power". On the basis of that he argues in thesis 32 that "the human being is justified by faith". This is the central and comprehensive definition of being human. On account of it, every human being is a sinner apart from justification (theses 33–34). Justification is not understood, therefore, as a human activity but as something that God does to humans. Luther's anthropology therefore can be called an anthropology of grace. One of the best places to see this insight applied is in his commentary on the *Magnificat*. In it Mary is understood as "the foremost example of the grace of God" (Luther 1956, p. 323).

It is interesting therefore to study Cabasilas' Mariological homilies and Luther's commentary on the Magnificat in order to attempt to understand how these two theologians responded to the challenge of humanism, with special reference to the role of Mary, and yet they drew such different conclusions. Cabasilas presents Mary as the prime example of his anthropology of synergy, whereas Luther as the supreme example of grace. Why then is Luther so far apart from Cabasilas?

2. Cabasilas' Mariological Homilies

In what follows we shall summarize Cabasilas' Mariological thought as it is expressed in his three homilies: *On the (Theotokos') Birth*, *On the Annunciation*, and *On the Dormition* (Nellas 2010). For Cabasilas, man was created and endowed with power against sin. This power, though, must be activated. He writes, "That is why it is absolutely necessary to believe that God has placed in our nature the power to deal with every sin and has commanded us to turn this power into action." (*On the Birth*, p. 61) Tragically, humanity failed, for though the power against sinning "existed in their nature and was in everyone . . . they did not use this power, nor was there anyone who lived without sin" (pp. 63–64). This "disease" has spread to humanity and has prevailed to the extent that "everyone's nature is wicked" (64). Man was affected by sin to such an extent that he "was obscure

(invisible, non-manifest), though he existed in myriads of human bodies" (ibid.). The Holy Virgin though, "through her love (ἔρως) of God, the power of her thought, the straightforwardness of her will and the greatness of her spirit" (Loudovikos, p. 63[2]/*On the Birth*, p. 66) drove away all sin and won a trophy such as cannot be compared to anything else. "This way, she uncovered the true human nature as it was originally created . . . " (Tsirpanlis 1979, p. 93). She was and she will be "the only human being who preserved the image of God entirely spotless and embodied the ideal humanity" (Tsirpanlis 1979, p. 93).

The key question then becomes, "how could the Virgin alone escape the common disease, being just human and without receiving anything more than other men?" (Tsirpanlis 1979). His wonder is such that Cabasilas repeats the question, "how could she do it?" (ibid.). Once again, "what, then was the cause of the Virgin's victory?" (ibid., p. 70) The answer is that she accomplished it "only by herself and with the weapons that God has given to all men for the fight of virtue" (74). Through her strife and sanctity she "attracted (God's) grace" ('καί τήν χάριν εἴλκυσεν') (72). Grace is explained as "power against sin" (ibid.) and is given to her as the divine response to what she had already achieved through her effort. The Holy Virgin therefore becomes God's co-worker and helper. She is the "helper of the creator" in the act of the re-creation of broken humanity (104) and as Eve was Adam's helper, so the Virgin "helped God to show his goodness" (ibid.). She was not simply an "instrument" that God used to accomplish His purpose, but His co-worker ('συνεργός') (106).

One may argue, therefore, that Cabasilas presents us with a Godward humanism, which has the concept of synergy at its center and the Holy Virgin as its prime exemplar and paradigm. Indeed, we read that through her example and achievement "she opened the door of holiness to others by being properly prepared to receive the Savior . . . ." (*On the Dormition*, Nellas 2010, pp. 186−87). The Blessed Virgin "is the *par excellence* first man (in the sense of ideal and original manhood) since she alone fully realized the divine ideal in human nature" (Tsirpanlis 1979, p. 91/*On the Birth*, p. 56).

A closer look, however, presents us with a much more complex picture.[3] For example, paying closer attention to one of the passages that we have already mentioned we note that Cabasilas claims that the Holy Virgin was the only one who preserved the purity of human nature not only among those who have come in the past ('μόνη τῶν γενομένων'), but also those who will come in the future ('καὶ τῶν ἔπειτ' ἐσομένων ἀνθρώπων') (*On the Birth*, Nellas 2010, p. 68). In other words, she is not only the first but also the only one who managed to purify herself by actualizing the power given to humanity against sin. Cabasilas explains further, "besides her, from all the rest there is in none 'pure from impurity' as the prophet said" (ibid.). Mary stands, therefore, as a unique exception to what is otherwise the common inescapable human condition. This human condition is portrayed as that of a body that has been so completely destroyed by disease that there is "nothing left, so the one who wants to cure that body cannot do anything to restore health to it." (*On the Dormition*, Nellas 2010, p. 173) Therefore, in the eyes of God, "all human righteousness is, according to the Bible, more vile than any abomination, and it is called wickedness" (171). Thus, "because, we the people, after we lost because of the fall the happiness for which we were created, we have been craving it unceasingly ever since. But none of the angels or the humans had the power to offer it to us again. And we kept getting worse, so it's impossible to get back to our original state." (164)

Mary, therefore, is the only exception to that common human fate, something that makes one wonder whether her exception tells us anything at all about humanity or whether it is mostly about her and her unique role in the divine economy. In other words, the emphasis is not so much on Mary's example as on Mary's exception (*On the Birth*, Nellas 2010, p. 108). Thus it appears that what we have in these homilies is not so much anthropology but perhaps a primitive, embryonic sophiological Mariology. By this, of course, I refer to Bulgakov's sophiological Mariology (Bulgakov 2002, 2009) and I purport that it provides us with a key to understanding Cabasilas' thought. We need to clarify that we do not imply that there is a direct link between the two but that one may discern

an elective affinity[4]. In other words, in a similar way to Bulgakov's, Cabasilas views the Theotokos not as a typical human being but as one which stands in the realm of the "in-between": God and man, heaven and earth, the uncreated and the created. In a characteristic passage, Cabasilas declares that, "the Virgin not only did she heralded God, but she also manifested to humanity the enhypostasized wisdom of God ('ἐνυπόστατον τοῦ Θεοῦ σοφίαν') not in signs or images but in an immanent way God himself" (*On the Dormition*, Nellas 2010, p. 190). She is human but she is also the "alight ray" ('ἀφιγμὲνης ἀκτῖνος') (*On the Birth*, Nellas 2010, p. 88) which comes to earth. As the sun sheds its light making the beauty of the objects visible without participating in their nature, so the Virgin does with humans (*On the Dormition*, Nellas 2010, p. 174). The Blessed Virgin becomes the "heaven of heavens", an appellation reserved for God only (*On the Dormition*, Nellas 2010, p. 170). Therefore, the Holy Mother "stands in between God and humans" (ibid., p. 168). She is human, but at the same time, "her exceptional virtue" makes her only on a par with God (*On the Dormition*, Nellas 2010, p. 178). Her righteousness was not "within the human realm" but not only as matter of degree for she has "altered our common nature" in such a way that made it impossible to measure the distance. As a result of her accomplishment and virtue, she stands between God and humanity (ibid.). She is "the comforter on our behalf in the presence of God, even before the arrival of the Comforter" (*On the Annunciation*, Nellas 2010, p. 118).

The Holy Virgin time and again is presented to us not as an example of what we should or could do ourselves but as acting "on our behalf" ('ὑπέρ') and "in our place" ('ἀντί') (*On the Dormition*, p. 174). She offers her righteousness "for the sake of" ('ὑπέρ') the world and in this way she "justifies" everyone, which is something that Cabasilas admits that Paul said of the Savior. Jesus Christ, the Savior, is the "source" (or cause—αἴτιος) of our sanctity but the Holy Virgin is the "fellow-source" (συναἰτιος) (ibid. 206). Of course, one may wonder whether this expression and others like it are to be understood as a hyperbole in the context of a laudatory homily. Is it simply an elevated way of speaking with the intention to underline her role as the medium through which the Savior came and worked for our salvation?[5] It is interesting to see how Cabasilas finishes the sentence quoted above; the Holy Virgin is the "fellow-source" of our sanctification as we receive "through her" (διά σοῦ) what Jesus has to offer but also because of what she has to contribute (τῶν σῶν). Therefore, it should not surprise us that he considers her "on par with the great victim" (that is Jesus Christ) since "she on her own destroyed the enmity and opened heaven" (*On the Birth*, p. 73).

Having contested the scholarly consensus which considers the Mariological homilies as a source of theological anthropology, we continue to affirm "the principle of synergy" (Nellas 110) as central in all three homilies. Mary's achievement is based on and is explained by the logic of synergy. The "law of divine righteousness" is that God gives his benefactions not to all but to those "who have contributed to what leads to their consummation ('συντέλεια')" (*On the Dormition*, p. 176). Fulfilling this law, Mary "attracted" God through her "immaculate life, pure walk, refusal of all evil, exercise in every virtue, having a soul purer than light, a spiritual body brighter than the sun, impeccable than the heavens and more sacred than the thrones of the cherubim. Her mind flies fearless of any hight, better than the angels' wings. She is full of Divine eros which consummated any other desire of the soul". Because of that life of virtue she reached "possession of God" ('Θεοῦ κατοχή') and "coition with God" ("Θεοῦ συνουσία") (*On the Annunciation*, p. 116). God, in His work of redemption, takes the Virgin as "participant" (κοινωνόν) to his decision (ibid., p. 126) and "helper" ('βοηθόν') in His manifestation of His goodness (*On the Birth*, p. 108).

3. Luther's Commentary on the *Magnificat*

When we come to Luther's commentary on the *Magnificat*, we seem to be entering a different world. Before commenting on its contents, it is worth noting that, according to the Preface, this work is dedicated to Prince John Frederick, Duke of Saxony. Luther writes

addressing Frederick because "the heart of man, being by nature flesh and blood, it is of itself prone to presumption. And when, in addition, power, riches and honour come to him, these form so strong an incentive to presumption and smugness that he forgets God and does not care about his matters" (298). That is why there is no more appropriate part of the Bible than the Magnificat in order to teach and instruct Frederick the art of humility. The commentary is a phrase-by-phrase exposition of Mary's song. It consists, in addition to the preface, of an introduction and ten sections corresponding to the ten phrases into which Luther has divided the hymn.

Especially noteworthy is the fact that Luther does not hesitate to pray to Mary before starting his work: "May the tender Mother of God herself procure wisdom, profitably and thoroughly to expound this song of hers, so that your Grace as well as we all may draw from it wholesome knowledge and a praiseworthy life, and thus come to chant and sing this Magnificat eternally in heaven. To this may God help us. Amen."

For Luther, Mary's song is a doxology to the grace of God (Wright 1989, pp. 164–66). At its heart there is the question: "how should a creature deserve to become the Mother of God?" (327) Of course, for Luther this question is rhetorical. No creature can ever deserve such an honor. Reading carefully the biblical text and staying close to the witness of the Holy Virgin herself, Luther observes that "Mary freely ascribes all to God's grace, not to her merit" (327). Though he believes that Mary was without sin (Wright 1989, pp. 174–76), he insists that God's grace was bestowed in her as a gift and not as a reward. Mary was suited to become the Mother of our Lord by being a woman, virgin, from the tribe of Judah and ready to accept the angelic message. Suitability, however, does not entail worthiness or merit (136). The key word that sets the tone of the entire hymn is the word "despite".

Already at the very beginning of the introduction of his commentary he writes, "when the Holy Virgin, then, experienced what great things God was working in her, *despite* her insignificance, lowliness, poverty, and inferiority, the Holy Spirit taught her this deep insight and wisdom, that God is the kind of Lord who does nothing but exalt those of low degree and puts down the mighty to break whatever is whole and make whole whatever is broken" (299). Her basic virtue was humbleness. The word 'ταπείνωσιν' (humilitas) in the text should not be rendered as "humility", a virtue that Mary could attain and could therefore boast about. "In His sight we ought to boast only of His pure grace and goodness, which He bestows upon us, unworthy ones" (313). On the contrary, when Mary refers to her "humbleness", it is as if she says: "God has regarded me, a poor, despised and lowly maiden, though He might have found a rich, renowned, noble and mighty queen, the daughter of princes and great lords. He might have found the daughter of Annas or of Caiaphas, who held the highest position in the land. But He let His pure and gracious eyes light on me, and used so poor and despised a maiden, in order that no one might glory in His presence, as though he were worthy of this, and that I must acknowledge it all to be pure grace and goodness and no at all my merit or worthiness" (314).

What attracts God's eyes is not her stature but the "depths" of her human existence. God acts as in creation, ex nihilo. He does not turn his eyes to the heights but to the depths of human existence. Being the Most High, He has nowhere else to look but inside Himself and lower than Him. We need to clarify here two things. The first thing is that by emphasizing "humility", Luther does not promote an anthropology of misery. He emphasizes that the Virgin Mary boasts neither about her worthiness, nor about her unworthiness. That is, what we have here is not a masochistic, self-loathing attitude. The opposite of a man-centered humanism is not misanthropy. Luther's point in his analysis is that what ultimately matters is the divine initiative; it is not what Mary is or does but God's decision to look upon her (314).

What explains Luther's motive emphasizing the divine "despite" and Mary's "unworthiness" is his steady commitment not to "overshadow or diminish even in the slightest the glory of God" (327). Commenting on the first phrase of the Magnificat, he notes that the Virgin Mary's last word is "God". She does not say "my soul magnifies itself" nor "exalt me". She does not desire to be honored. She magnifies only God (*Soli Deo Gloria*)

and gives all glory to Him (308). This again is for the benefit of the believer. Because the experience of God's mercy to those who are poor, despised, abandoned and insignificant makes their hearts to "overflow with gladness and go leaping and dancing for the great pleasure it has found in God" (300). Emphasizing the Virgin Mary's "humility" does not mean that Luther underestimates her. His commentary is full of respect and affection for her, in ways that perhaps he could teach us Protestants to overcome our awkwardness in front of her. It is worth noting the ways in which he addresses or makes reference to her. The two most common are "Maria", as might be expected, but also "Mother of God". He also calls her "Blessed Mother of God", "Sweet Mother of God", "Blessed Virgin Mary", "Holy Virgin", "Sweet Mother of Christ", "Pure and Righteous Virgin" etc. In two parts of his work, in fact, he teaches us the right way to give her honor providing us with two "salutations" towards her. Here is one of them.

"O Blessed Virgin, Mother of God, what great comfort God has shown us in you, by so graciously regarding your unworthiness and low estate. This encourages us to believe that henceforth He will not despise us poor and lowly ones, but graciously regard us also, according to your example" (323)

Luther's analysis has a definite pastoral dimension. The Holy Virgin is "the foremost example of the grace of God" (323) that could teach us and help us to understand the ways of God. She is different from us, but at the same time she is just like us; in order to give us confidence (323). Luther comments that her hymn contains the wonderful works of God and serves a threefold purpose as it is given "for the strengthening of our faith, for the comforting of all those of low degree, and for the terrifying of all the mighty ones of earth." We are to let the hymn serve this threefold purpose; for she sang it not for herself alone, but for us all, that we should sing it after her" (306).

It is a comforting, optimistic anthropology of divine grace.

4. Why, Then, Is Luther So Far Apart from Cabasilas?

There are many ways by which we could have tried to explain the difference of perspective between Cabasilas and Luther. We will focus on the one that we believe is central. In short, Cabasilas' Mariology constitutes a theology of glory, while Luther's a theology of the cross. An attempt to describe in detail what we mean by the terms theology of glory and theology of the cross is beyond the scope and limits of our study. There are, however, several points to make that will help us grasp the main thrust of this important aspect in Luther's theology. First of all, it is important to emphasize that according to almost all of Luther's interpreters, his theology of the cross is not simply about the content of his theology, but is also about the way he does theology, his theological method and perspective. Before we articulate it, it will be useful to make reference to three of Luther's theses from his famous *Heidelberg Disputation* (Luther 1957, p. 40) which best encapsulate his understanding of his theology of the cross:

Thesis 19. That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened (Rom. 1:20).

Thesis 20. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things go God seen through suffering and the cross.

Thesis 21. A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls things what they actually are.

The error of the theologians of glory is that they do not approach reality through the lens of God's revelation. They think according to the logic of the world, according to what seems apparent and obvious. They think that "the way the world appears to be is actually an accurate account of who God is" (Trueman 2015, p. 62). On the other hand, the theologian of the cross focuses on the revelation of God, particularly at the point He chose to reveal Himself, namely on the Cross. That does not mean that he reduces God's revelation only to that single event, but that he makes the cross the "fundamental criterion for the theology of the gospel" (ibid., p. 63). Thus, for the theologian of the cross, paradox

is at the heart of the theological method. In contrast to this, for the theologian of glory, reciprocity is the focal point. Trueman comments, "the world around us operates on the basis of reciprocity: those who do good are the ones who consequently receive a reward; those who do evil receive punishment" (ibid., p. 62). The theologian of glory assumes that the same principles apply in the way God deals with humanity.

With that in mind, we come once again to examine Cabasilas' Mariology focusing now on the concept of synergy. Building his Mariological argument, Cabasilas starts with the saints of the Old Testament emphasizing their merit and then talks about Abraham who "as a reward of his piety became the patriarch of a nation . . . ". The same goes for those who will bring the Virgin Mary to life. The logic that governs Cabasilas' thinking is that "God gave the greatest of all the gifts to humanity through those who were in every way the best." On account of that principle, addressing the parents of the Virgin Mary, he says, "the fact that you were able to accomplish such great things before God and were honoured because of them with such admirable honour is a glorious proof that you are more beloved of all men to God. The crown proves and reveals the achievement and this is because God 'measures all things with fair measures'" (*On the Birth*, pp. 46–50). According to this logic, "grace" is defined as the "goal" (τέλος) of the Law (ibid., p. 50) and the "fulfilment ('πλήρωμα') of the law" (52). They received grace because they were "strict observers of the law" (53). Grace is not a gift but a fruit or an achievement. They have built the house so that grace can then place the roof at the top (ibid. p. 52). God's call to synergy with Him comes as a reward for our achievement to live a life of purity (*On the Birth*, p. 46). Therefore, the Holy Virgin "attracts" God and becomes His "helper" (*On the Birth*, p. 108) because she has first lived an "immaculate life" (*On the Annunciation*, p. 116). Therefore, "through her beauty she showed the beauty of the common human nature; and thus she attracted the dispassionate God and he became man because of her" (ibid. p. 118). It is important to underline the word "because", which reveals the logic of reciprocity. God's righteousness is understood in terms of fairness, that is for God to render to everyone according to his or her deeds (*On the Annunciation*, p. 146). On that account, when Mary's achievement is placed on the "scale" of God's righteousness, it is only fair (δίκαιον ἦν) for Him to make her the Mother of God (ibid.). That is why, when Gabriel brings the good news to Mary, there is no surprise, no wonder on her part, "her mind was not disturbed nor did she consider that she was not worthy of this work" (*On the Annunciation*, p. 132). This is because "she was aware that there was nothing in her soul incompatible with the mystery and that her life was such that she couldn't mention any human weakness of hers" (ibid., p. 130). She loved God with such intensity that "it would be completely unlikely that God would not consider it His duty to give her a proportionate ('ἀντίρροπον') reward to become her son" (ibid., p. 148).

This logic of merit, reciprocity and proportionality lies at the heart of Cabasilas' concept of synergy and is, according to Luther, also at the heart of the theology of glory. For the theologian of the cross, the key work is not the word "because" but "despite". The key question is not one of admiration: "how could the Virgin alone escape the common disease, being just human and without receiving anything more than other men?" (Tsirpanlis 1979, p. 93/*On the Birth*, p. 68) but of humility "how should a creature deserve to become the Mother of God?" (327)

5. Bridging the Gap

As we bring our study to a close, it is worth making four final remarks which may help, so to say, to bridge the gap between Cabasilas and Luther, or more generally between the Eastern Orthodox and the Evangelical positions on Mary.

5.1. The Question of Synergy as It Relates to Mariology Remains a Stumbling Block for Evangelicals

It is one of most troubling issues, even if we may not share Barth's vehement sentiments when he claims that "in the doctrine and worship of Mary there is disclosed the one heresy of the Roman Catholic Church which explains all the rest" and he explains that "the

'mother of God' or Roman Catholic Marian dogma is quite simply the principle, type and essence of the human creature co-operating servantlike in its own redemption on the basis of prevenient grace, and to that extent the principle type and essence of the Church" (Barth 1978, p. 143).[6] Interestingly enough a good corrective to this emphasis on synergy may be found in Cabasilas' other work, On the Life of Christ. It is beyond the scope of our study but it will be interesting to note that Nellas, who otherwise is an enthusiastic admirer of the theology of synergy[7], admits that in On the Life of Christ, Cabasilas is "being faithful to the Biblical tradition he relativizes without a doubt every human endeavour and strife for the achievement of righteousness and he rejects every autonomous human endeavour which is 'our own'". (Nellas 1998, p. 110).

5.2. In Order to Locate the Question of Synergy in Its Proper Theological Context We Need to Move beyond the Juxtaposition of the Theologies of Glory and of the Cross

I believe that at the root of this juxtaposition there is a contrast between two different understandings of the economy of salvation: one that has at its center the Incarnation (Eastern Orthodox) and another that has at its center the Cross (Protestant). One may argue that the Orthodox emphasis on the Holy Virgin is due to the importance they place on the doctrine of the Incarnation. Perhaps, finding a way to develop a more robust theology of the Incarnation without moving away from a strong affirmation of the centrality of the Cross may help us Evangelicals to more appreciate Mary's role in the mystery of the divine economy.

5.3. A Helpful Question to Raise Is Whether We Can Find a Point of Equilibrium between Cabasilas and Luther

On the one hand, we have Cabasilas with his elevated view of Mary as God's co-worker, helper and even co-redemptrix. On the other hand, Luther, trying to stress God's grace, focuses on Mary's unworthiness, limiting her role simply to the fact that she was a woman, a virgin, of the tribe of Judah and ready to believe the angelic message. She is suitable only in a sense that was equally true of the wooden cross. Of course, both Luther and Calvin rejected the extremes of the Radical Protestants, who saw Mary simply as a channel through which Christ flowed (Wright 1989, pp. 168–69). We believe that there is a useful distinction to make between thinking of Mary as either "praiseworthy" or "meritorious". As Evangelicals, we affirm the former but not the latter. Luther's approach shows some ambivalence because on the one hand he emphasizes Mary's low estate and nothingness but on the other, he shows affection and respect to her. He says, "Hence men have crowded all her glory into a single word, calling her the Mother of God" (Luther 1956, p. 326).

5.4. The More We Couple Mariology to Christology, the More We May Find Common Ground, Evangelicals and Orthodox, in Honouring the Blessed Theotokos

As we have noted already, part of the explanation for the honour ascribed to Mary in the Orthodox tradition in general and in Cabasilas in particular, has a Christological grounding. It is the mystery and glory of the Incarnation that makes Mary's role unique and praiseworthy. Keeping the focus on Christ, for both Orthodox Christians and Evangelicals, may therefore be the key to finding a common ground in our understanding and honoring of Mary.

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Notes

[1] Cabasilas' theology of the "sacraments" show concrete evidence of his knowledge of Lombard's *Sentences* (Kappes 2017, pp. 488–91).

[2] When the name of an author follows a quotation, it is an indication that we follow his or her translation of the passage from Cabasilas' homily. Otherwise, all translations from the Greek text are ours.

[3] In addition to the issue which will give attention to in our analysis, we need to make reference to the open debate around the question of whether Cabasilas espoused the dogma of the Immaculate Conception or not. Typically, Roman Catholic scholars argue that the homilies give us evidence that Cabasilas accepted that dogma whereas Eastern Orthodox Christians deny it. Our opinion is there is an ambivalence and indecision on Cabasilas on this matter. For more, see (Tsirpanlis 1979; Loudovikos 2016).

[4] We use the term *elective affinity* in the same way that Max Weber used it in his analysis of the relationship between Protestantism and Capitalism (McKinnon 2010). Andrew Louth commenting on Bulgakov's Mariology writes, "For Bulgakov the association of Sophiology and Mariology is bound up with his concern for what one might call the 'in between', the region between God and the created cosmos. Rather than keeping them radically apart, as the Christian doctrine of creation ex nihilo can be conceived as entailing, Bulgakov is concerned to explore the frontier between the uncreated God and the created cosmos, a frontier conceived of equally in terms of Sophia and of the Mother of God." (Louth 2019, p. 297) Here is how Bulgakov understands the role of the Virgin: "In her is realized the idea of Divine Wisdom in the creation of the world, she is Divine Wisdom in the created world. It is in her that Divine Wisdom is justified, and thus the veneration of the Virgin blends with that of the Holy Wisdom. In the Virgin there are united Holy Wisdom and the Wisdom of the created world, the Holy Spirit and the human hypostasis. Her body is completely spiritual and transfigured. She is the justification, the end and the meaning of creation. She is, in this sense, the glory of the world. In her God is already 'all in all'". (Bulgakov 1935, p. 139).

[5] Meyendorff warns us that in the context of the poetical, emotional, or rhetorical exaggerations characteristic of Byzantine liturgical Mariology one needs to be careful how to understand various concepts related to the role and person of the Holy Virgin (Meyendorff 1974, p. 148).

[6] Of course one may note that Barth's criticism obviously refers to the Roman Catholic Marian dogma. Nevertheless, his criticism on the theme of synergy applies just as well to the Eastern Orthodox Mariology.

[7] An interesting question to explore is the relationship between the concept of "free will" and "synergy". Whether, in other words, the two refer to the same or a different reality. An interesting historical note here is the discussion concerning Melanchthon's latter views on the origins of faith. For more, see (Graybill 2010).

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A Tentative Proposal to Use Orthodox Theological Relational Selfhood as an Alternative for Confucian-Influenced Chinese Evangelicals

Tsung-I Hwang

T. I. Hwang's Cross Theology Classroom, Puli 545, Taiwan; mtsungih@gmail.com

Abstract: Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Chinese evangelicals have rarely interacted. Even if it seems that Eastern Orthodox Christianity and its theology have hardly influenced Chinese evangelicals in the past, this article demonstrates the possibility that Orthodox theology can still indirectly transform Confucian-influenced Chinese evangelicals. Moltmann, a great contemporary Protestant theologian, is influenced deeply by Stăniloae, a great modern Eastern Orthodox theologian, particularly in the development of social trinitarian theology in Eastern Orthodox heritage. Moltmann argues that social trinitarian anthropology can prevent the social and individual problems appeared in the societies shaped by either individualism or collectivism. Selfhood is one academic language used to discuss this relationship between the self and society. Despite modernization and westernization, contemporary Chinese people are still deeply influenced by Confucian models of relational selfhood. Even for Chinese evangelicals who had converted years ago, their way of thinking and behavior might be as much Confucian as biblical. The Confucian-influenced collectivist mindset may lead to problematic selfhood and more challenging interpersonal relationships. This article uses Orthodox theology via Moltmann's social trinitarian, Stăniloae-inspired approach to develop an alternative relational selfhood for contemporary Chinese Christians.

Keywords: Moltmann; Stăniloae; Eastern Orthodox; Chinese evangelicals; collectivism; social trinitarian anthropology; Confucian-influenced/Ru-influenced; repressed form of self; relational selfhood

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1. Introduction

The Orthodox Christian church is the third-largest Christian faith in the world. However, it Orthodox Christians are an exceedingly small minority among Chinese Christians, living in Mainland China,[1] Hong Kong, Macau, or Taiwan. Only about 0.015% of Christians in this area, and 0.02% among evangelicals, identify as members of an Orthodox church (Mandryk 2010, pp. 215–16, 252–53, 256, 259). Consequently, Orthodox Christianity and its theology are very alien to Chinese evangelicals. There is hardly direct contact between the Orthodox church and Chinese evangelicals. However, Orthodox influence can still occur in an indirect way. Applying the findings of the author's PhD thesis (Hwang 2018) to further development and research, this paper will introduce a tentative proposal to show how Orthodox theology can still indirectly influence Confucian-influenced Chinese evangelicals. This proposal is about how social trinitarian theology, in the Eastern Orthodox heritage (Mosser 2009, p. 132), is transmitted from Dumitru Stăniloae (1903–1993), through Jürgen Moltmann (1926–), and then can be applied to transform the Confucian/Ru-influenced selfhood of Chinese evangelical Christians. In this article, Ruism/Confucianism, Ru/Confucian, Ruist/Confucianist, and Ruification/Confucianization refer to the same tradition or set of traditions. *Confucianism* and related terms are sometimes seen as a mistranslation of a larger cultural, philosophical, and religious tradition, emphasizing the personhood of Confucius. By contrast, the Chinese word for the term, *ru*, is much broader and more inclusive. Therefore, in the contemporary, or *post-traditional*, context, where Ru-inspired Chinese is broader, the term Ruism/Ruist, rather than Confucianism/Confucian,

serves as a more pertinent and helpful description. Besides, it is notable that some parts of the explanation and description of the proposal in this paper are given in a brief synopsis. The author's exploration in greater depth and longer discussion with comprehensive interdisciplinary references can be seen in his previous works.

2. How and in Which Area Moltmann Was Influenced by Stăniloae

2.1. Who Is Jürgen Moltmann?

Jürgen Moltmann is a world-famous and influential German (evangelical) Reformed theologian who is currently a professor emeritus at the University of Tübingen. He was once the pastor of the Evangelical Church of Bremen-Wasserhorst (Neal 2009, p. 368), the editor of the periodical Evangelische Theologie (Moltmann 2009, p. 201), and the president of the Society for Evangelical Theology in Germany (Moltmann 2009, p. 254), and was conferred the first honorary doctorate by the Nicaraguan Evangelical University (Moltmann 2009, p. 370). However, he is not viewed as an evangelical theologian by all evangelical theologians, mainly Anglophonic ones (Chung 2012a), due to his "ecumenical", "revisionist", and "liberationist" theological position (Chung 2012b, p. 1; Buxton 2012, p. 65). (Confusing things further is the fact that the German term *Evangelical* is often used generically to describe Protestants.) Undoubtedly, as indicated in his autobiography, *A Broad Place* (Moltmann 2009), and his *Experiences in Theology* (Moltmann 2000)—the summary of his journey of theology—Moltmann does not confine his theological discussion to the area of evangelical theology. He is not only open to engaging ecumenically with traditional theologies from both Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches but is also willing to discuss questions from a great variety of contemporary theologies, including charismatic theology, liberation theology, and public theology. Although Moltmann's evangelical status is beyond the scope of this paper, his theology has influenced evangelicalism, especially Chinese evangelicals, because more than fifteen of his books have been translated and published in Chinese, mainly by the evangelical publishers in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Besides his famous work *Theology of Hope* (Moltmann 1967) and his prominent eschatology, Moltmann is, in particular, a contemporary pioneer in the Latin-based Church tradition, including Catholic and Protestant Churches, in paying attention to the social trinitarian doctrine—whose model of the Trinity "begin[ning] with God's threeness, defines the divine essence generically, and is fond of multi-person social analogies of the Trinity" (Mosser 2009, p. 132), is highly valued in the Eastern Orthodox Church tradition due to its "rejection of filioque" (Nalunnakkal 2005, p. 11)—and extending it to develop his interpretations of relational selfhood (Grenz 2001, p. 16). Moltmann (1981, p. 189) traced this concept of social Trinity back to "the Cappadocian doctrine of the Trinity". Although there are other contemporary scholars who also argue for the social model of the Trinity, their interpretations vary considerably. Besides, Moltmann is one of the few based on the doctrine of the imago Dei, and social trinitarian theology develops a comprehensive and profound social trinitarian anthropology in his interpretation, in which the eschatological perspective of his social Trinitarian theology is very essential in the "becoming" dimension of human selfhood (Moltmann 1981, p. 216f). Furthermore, Moltmann might be the only social trinitarian theologian who engages himself in understanding Chinese culture and dialoguing with Daoism and Ruism in his works (Moltmann 1989, pp. 87–101, 1998, 2008b).

2.2. Who Is Dumitru Stăniloae?

Dumitru Stăniloae was appreciated by both Moltmann and other Western theologians and Orthodox theologians as one of the modern greats in Orthodox theology (Juhász 1979, p. 752; Moltmann 2014, p. 37; Toma 2014, pp. 12–16; Munteanu 2015, pp. 25–32). The main task of this Romanian theologian, the late professor at the Theological Institute of Bucharest (Juhász 1979, p. 752), was to promote patristic theology, namely early Christian theology during the first five centuries, establishing "contemporary neo-patristic theology," namely, "a creative return to the patristic theology" (Croitoru 2019, p. 89), and producing "existential personalism" and "neo-patristic revival" in both Orthodox and the Western

theologies (Louth 1997, pp. 261–62; Toma 2014, pp. 10, 16), and confront with and solve man's modern problems (Juhász 1979, p. 747). As "a link between East and West" by bridging "the cultural gap" between them with "trinitarian spirituality" (Toma 2014, pp. 14–15, 21–22; Munteanu 2015, pp. 30, 32), his significant contribution to both western and orthodox theologies is of Trinitarian, Pneumatological, ecumenical, ecological, and trinitarian anthropological theology (Stăniloae 1994, pp. 53–78, 2000, pp. 65–112, 2012; Miller 2000, pp. 25–54; Bordeianu 2010; Munteanu 2015, pp. 26–27).

2.3. The Influence of Stăniloae on Moltmann's Development of Social Trinitarian Theology

Compared to Moltmann, Dumitru Stăniloae is not as world-famous and influential as Moltmann. However, his influence on Moltmann is second only to Karl Barth (Moltmann 2014, p. 30). Moltmann had engaged in the ecumenical movement as a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC) since 1963. Through attending the Klingenthal Conferences of 1978 and 1979 on the "filioque" problem in the doctrine of the Trinity (Moltmann 2014, pp. 30–36),[2] he and Stăniloae began a fifteen-year journey of deep friendship—like son and father, as Moltmann describes—and theological conversation (Moltmann 2014, p. 30). Thanks to Stăniloae, Orthodox theology became more and more important for Moltmann in the second half of his life. As a result, Moltmann is convinced that Western theology will still be able to learn a great deal from this wonderful Eastern theology of its own (Moltmann 2014, p. 30).

Influenced by Stăniloae's richer trinitarian understanding of the coming of the Holy Spirit than the controversial "filioque" formula could provide, the theologians in the Klingenthal Conferences reached an agreement to recommend that the Western churches delete the "filioque" from the creed and that both Eastern and Western theologians continue to work to develop the trinitarian mystery of God (Moltmann 2014, pp. 34–35). Based on this new insight, Moltmann then developed a "social doctrine of the Trinity" in his *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God* (Moltmann 1981)—its original German version was published in 1980 (Munich: Chr. Kaiser). Later, he developed a "holistic pneumatology" under the title *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Moltmann 1992)—its original German version was published in 1991 (Munich: Chr. Kaiser).

The most important foundation of Moltmann's social trinitarian doctrine is based on Patristic theologians' understanding of the concept of "the *sociality* of the three divine Persons", namely perichoresis—divine communion (Moltmann 1981, p. 198, emphasis original, thereafter, "eo"). This is also what Staniloae emphasizes in his doctrine of the Trinity, from which he develops his theology of love (Stăniloae 1994, chp. Ten; Moltmann 2014, p. 37). The author finds that this insight into perichōrēsis keeps Moltmann's social triune God distinguishable and distinctive from either God as three modes of being or God as the supreme substance. He (Moltmann 2008a, pp. 372–75) pinpoints three indispensable elements in the perichoretic existence and relationships between the three persons of the Triune God: unity; diversity; and equality (*non-hierarchical* symmetry).[3] Based on this foundation and Christology, Moltmann develops first his concept of the "*open Trinity*" to interpret the gracious relationship between the Triune God and sinful humans (Moltmann 1977, pp. 55, eo; 1981, pp. 90–96; 1985, p. 242). Through the doctrine of the image of God based on the doctrine of social Trinity and his open Trinity, he establish his comprehensive social trinitarian anthropology to interpret the *perichoresis-oriented* interpersonal relationships among human persons, derived from a *functional template*—the image of the Trinity: the perichoretic relationships between the three persons of the Triune God (Stăniloae 1980, p. 36; Moltmann 1985, pp. 215–43). Unity, diversity, and equality (*non-hierarchical* symmetry) are also the elements of such a community, and this community is an "open community"—namely "open friendship" in Moltmann's term (Moltmann 1978, pp. 50–63)—and a *community of grace* in the author's term—namely, "the Community of the Free" in Moltmann's term (Moltmann 1981, pp. 198–211).[4]

It is notable that Moltmann (1990, pp. 269–71, 1992, p. 254) presents his trinitarian theological anthropology as an alternative synthesis between collectivism (prevailing more

in Eastern Asian countries)—where the self tends to be soluble in relationships—and individualism (dominating more in Western Anglo-European countries)—where the self tends to be autonomous and separate.

There is more evidence to show that Moltmann's interpretations of social trinitarian doctrine are inspired or influenced by Orthodox theology/Stăniloae. For example, Moltmann's usage of the term "inter-subjectivity" to describe the divine unity (Stăniloae 1980, p. 94; 1994, pp. 260–78; Moltmann 2008a, p. 374). Moltmann's explanation of the Divine personal differences also shows this influence: "the very difference of the three Persons lies in their relational, perichoretically consummated life process" (Stăniloae 1980, p. 258; Moltmann 1981, p. 175). In addition, when Moltmann refers to humans' intimacy with God in terms of the Eastern Orthodox emphasis on *theosis* (Moltmann 1985, pp. 228–29), especially as the ground for liberation from "the pressure of the world," he relies on Stăniloae's claims (Moltmann 1985, pp. 228–29; Charry 1998, p. 106; Stăniloae 2000, pp. 89, 191–200).

3. Problematic Selfhood and Interpersonal Relationships Appears in Confucian-Influenced Chinese Evangelicals

Relational ethics dominates almost all the codes of conduct, interpersonal relationships, and value systems in post-traditional Ru-influenced Chinese societies.[5] Since the 1970s, the problem of selfhood and social repression has been seen as contributing to "personality disorders or other psychological and social problems" (Wong 2001, pp. 2, 24, 31), including suicide (Zhang et al. 2004, pp. 431, 435–36).[6] This has been identified as a product of Ruist relational ethics in a growing number of non-Ruist scholars' studies.[7] These include both theoretical and empirical research, produced in the realm of interdisciplinary social science studies, including, but not limited to, (socio-)psychological, sociological, historical, (psychological) anthropological, medical, and even business studies.[8] Drawing from and integrating the findings in an extensive literature review of these studies, the author, in another journal article (Hwang 2017, p. 105), adopted the phrase "repressed form of self" to integrate and describe a common critique, by scholars, of the Ruist self in post-traditional Ru-influenced Chinese societies.

This problem is produced in post-traditional Ru-influenced Chinese contexts of a *relational selfhood* resulting from some Ruist cultural elements: *familism* (*Ru-based collectivism*), an ingrained Ru-influenced *hierarchical social structure*, the absence of transcendent external creator God, and a strong ideology and practice of *moral self-cultivation* (Hwang 2018, pp. 41–63). Although this problematic selfhood and these causative Ruist elements have been identified by social science studies since the 1970s, some notable post-traditional Ruists, such as Weiming Tu (1985, p. 13), do not regard this problematic selfhood as the product of orthodox Ruist traditions or as native to orthodox Ruism. It is interesting that, although the New Ruist Weiming Tu (1976, pp. 52–54) criticizes the problem of collectivism, in a general sense, like those scholars, what he advocates for is actually a self with the same problematic characteristics. In his Ruist understanding, social roles are assigned, individual autonomy and subjectivity are restrained, and dominance is asserted. In other words, Tu's account of New Ruist relational selfhood fails to disprove scholarly critics regarding Ru-based collectivism. His so-called orthodox Ruist version of relational selfhood is essentially the same as the version criticized by social science scholars in post-traditional Ru-influenced contexts. For example, Tu (1985, pp. 8–9) maintains that the distinctions between self and society are unimportant in traditional Chinese or post-traditional Ruist thinking because he (Tu 1985, p. 82, eo) argues that the boundary between "*individual* and *society*" should vanish, and even the usage of the word "self" as well as first person pronouns should be "reconsidered". Hall and Ames (1998, p. 42), Hawaii Ruists describe this similar vision of Ruist selfhood in detail:[9]

> In the classical Chinese language, there is no distinction between the first person singular, *I*, and the first person plural, *we*. An *I* is always a *we*. Equally significant . . . is the absence . . . of any explicit and consistent distinction between the subjective *I/we* and the objective *me/us*. The *I/we* is embedded in the *me/us*.

Even if such an assertion can be criticized as being too over-generalized and reductionist, it is still noted as a claim that requests some serious consideration. This is exactly one of the reasons Xuewei Zhai 翟學偉 (Zhai 2010, p. 204) offers for why there are very few studies focusing on the Chinese self.[10] He generalizes that, in comparison with "the Western one," "the Chinese individual self" is not as emphasized or important as a Chinese cultural characteristics, and so is not considered to be worthy of study (ibid.).[11] However, it is notable that this problematic selfhood and the problem it produces is not unique to, but fortified in, Ru-influenced cultural contexts.

Ruification/Confucianization is a quite common phenomenon among contemporary Chinese, even Christians, because contemporary Chinese people and societies are still consciously and unconsciously influenced by Ruism. This phenomenon also appears among other East Asian Christians (Koh 1996; Oh 2003, p. 132; Lee 2006). The Ruification phenomenon of Christians' values, mindsets, and behavioral modes includes legalistic readings of scripture, emphasizing moral teachings and admonitions in sermons. In these scholars' readings, this leads to a "repressed form of the self", problematic lack of individuation, and interpersonal relationship problems. These predominate in Ru-influenced Chinese Christian evangelical contexts due to Ruification. These observations are echoed in the work of many scholars. Confirmations are found in works by Cheming Tan 陳濟民 (Tan 1988, pp. 18–21), Andrew Chiu 丘恩處 (Chiu 1999, pp. 222–23), Fènggǎng Yáng 楊鳳崗 (Yáng 2004), and Leechen Tsai 蔡麗貞 (Tsai 2014, p. 205), as well as foreign scholars and missionaries, such as Wright Doyle (2006, 2011), Jackson Wu (2011b), and Wendell W. Friest (2013, p. 199).This is a relatively new approach and only two studies by Chinfen Yu 余錦芬 and Yuting Huang 黃郁婷 (Yu and Huang 2009) and Zhuōjiā Lǐ 李卓嘉 (Lǐ 2013) involve the Ruification phenomenon among Chinese evangelical Christians. Both verify the existence of this phenomenon. However, these shared observations still need further development through the use of relevant ethnographic studies.[12] It is notable that the Ruification of Christianity has become a political means to restrain and control the development of Christianity in Mainland China in its new religious policy, initially formulated by Jìnpíng Xí 習近平 in 2016 (Song 2016).

Accordingly, social trinitarian anthropology is offered as a potential alternative to relational selfhood, which is quite new to Chinese evangelical Christians,[13] and might benefit post-traditional Ru-influenced Chinese, including Ru-influenced Chinese evangelical Christians.

4. How Social Trinitarian Anthropology Has Been Engaged in Transforming Ru-Influenced Chinese Evangelicals

After affirming the Ruist predicament in this problem through critically analyzing Tu Weiming's interpretation of Ruism, the author's theoretical study explores Moltmann's Christian social trinitarian account of relational selfhood to see whether, or to what extent, it can be a potential alternative solution to the problem of the repressed form of self in post-traditional Ru-influenced Chinese through a comprehensive analysis of the essential distinctness in Tu's and Moltmann's presuppositions and claims.

According to Moltmann's interpretation of social trinitarian anthropology, one's identity is made secure by *gracious moral cultivation*,[14] moral transformation by Christ's saving and transforming grace, in contrast to Ruist moral transformation by oneself, namely, moral self-cultivation, granted by the triune God but not by moral self-cultivation, so as to earn worthiness of social relationships. Besides this, in Moltmann (1992, p. 259, eo) interpretation, "the moral purpose of changing the world", which is the ultimate purpose of achievement-oriented Ruist moral cultivation (Tu 1990, pp. 74, 123, 177), is not considered as "the motive" for gracious moral cultivation. Instead, it expresses how the triune God made itself "wide open for *the others*" (Moltmann 1992, p. 259, eo). Therefore, Tu's moral self-cultivation and Moltmann's gracious moral cultivation are two essentially different life-transforming approaches, which exclude each other. The author succinctly summarizes Moltmann's gracious moral cultivation in this way.

The realization of a real self for any person is by the promise, grace, and works of the triune God, through the embedded *imago Dei* [(image of God)], namely the *imago Trinitatis* [(image of Trinity)]. This is God's work within human beings, a messianic redeeming and reconciling *imago Christi* [(image of Christ)], promising a hope for the transforming *gloria Dei* [(glory of God)] that is fulfilled for future fellowship with God and others in Christ (Moltmann 1981, 1985).

That is to say, Moltmann's social trinitarian account of relational selfhood is based on humans' status as both *being*, namely existent, and *becoming*, namely transformable, as the *imago Trinitatis*. The author further highlights the concrete difference between these two moral cultivations in practice.

In Moltmann's account of gracious moral cultivation, wisdom, holiness, and morality are the outcomes of a renewed image and likeness of God, bestowed to human beings in the New Creation. In contrast, in Tu's accounts of traditional and post-traditional Ruist ethics, it is promoted that they are the outcomes of pursuing moral self-cultivation through ceaseless activity. However, the outcomes are unattainable and unrealistic idealism, as the other New Ruist Shuhsien Liu (1987, pp. 228–30) admits.

As mentioned above, the community in Moltmann's social trinitarian account is "an open community of grace. According to the perichoresis-oriented template from God's social trinitarian relationships, this community is framed within its relationship with the open Trinity. Accordingly, this open community cultivates *open relational selves*, namely an orientation towards ontological equality among individuals in relation, a dynamic balance between the diversity of each individual and the unity of the community. Although in the *functional* social order of that community, each individual has their different duties and roles, they are ontologically equal. As a result, sincere and appropriately assertive expressions of self, mutual respect and submission, as well as direct and effective communication, can happen in such a community. Therefore, such a community also provides ways to overcome manipulative, demanding, coercive, co-dependent, hurting, and broken interpersonal relationships. Besides, in addition to a relational foundation, the absolute and objective value of the self in this open community is grounded in an external transcendent reference point—the triune God, instead of society, as in Tu Weiming's Ruist account.

Therefore, by offering relational options that do not demand a repressively socially imposed idealized morality, such a community is helpful to reveal the true *person,* without the continual need for negative masking, and so is able to liberate the repressed form of the self.

Although scholars such as Bellah (1980 and 1982, cited in Tu 1990, p. 8) are concerned with the problems caused by both individualism and collectivism, an individual person is undoubtedly never impervious to his/er own communal relationships, in which s/he is always embedded. Therefore, Moltmann's social trinitarian anthropology, as a special synthesis of the good elements of both individualism and collectivism, might fulfill this universal hope among scholars. The problems of the repressed form of self among post-traditional Ru-influenced Chinese Christians are closely related to problems of their personal development, especially before their conversion. It can be found that Moltmann's account of relational selfhood might nurture a transforming vision for personal development within Ru-influenced familial and communal settings. Consequently, Moltmann's theoretical approach might also provide a foundation for counselling, transformative psychology, and integrative psychotherapy, so as to liberate individuals and communities suffering from repressive social impositions.

In sum, in facing to the problem of a repressed form of self among post-traditional Ru-influenced Chinese evangelical Christians, Moltmann's Christian social trinitarian account of relational selfhood offers a concrete and promising alternative solution. It then becomes possible to liberate the repressed form of self and replace repressive social impositions with Moltmann's open relational options. The beneficial contribution of social trinitarian anthropology to post-traditional Ru-influenced Chinese, including Chinese evangelical Christians, is argued for because it provides a solution to liberating the repressed form of

self by developing and cultivating a different "relational selfhood." For Chinese evangelical Christians, the social trinitarian doctrine is not intended to replace their current trinitarian theology but to enrich it, because they need a Christian theological "relational selfhood."

In the proposal this paper presents, Moltmann's social trinitarian account of relational selfhood is proposed as an alternative solution to the repressed form of self that occurs in post-traditional Ru-influenced Chinese, including evangelical Christians. This shows how Orthodox theology can indirectly help to transform Ru-influenced Chinese evangelicals via Moltmann's Stăniloae-inspired approach. Undoubtedly, will take time to see how much Orthodox theology will influence Chinese evangelicals, and further empirical research is needed to verify how beneficial this social trinitarian anthropology will be for Ru-influenced Chinese evangelical Christians.

5. Conclusions

Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Chinese evangelicals have rarely interacted. Even if it seems that Eastern Orthodox Christianity and its theology have little influenced Chinese evangelicals in the past, the author's study forms a tentative proposal for how Orthodox theology can still indirectly transform Ru-influenced Chinese evangelicals through Dumitru Stăniloae's influence on Jürgen Moltmann.

In the same way, Orthodox theology might, through Moltmann's social trinitarian anthropology of relational selfhood, influence contemporary Ru-influenced Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese evangelicals.

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Notes

1 Most Orthodox Christians and churches are mainly in "Heilongjiang, Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang minority regions or Beijing" of Northern China due to the mission work of Russian Eastern Orthodox churches (Wang 2013, pp. 15–16).

2 This term *filioque* literally means "*and from the Son*" (Bromiley 1984, eo). In order to defend themselves against Arians, the Latin Western churches first added this phrase into the Nicene Creed (325) at the Council of Toledo in 589 to emphasize that "the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son", stressing "the perfect equality between the Son and the Father" in their full deity (Dulles 1995, pp. 31–32; Edgar and Oliphint 2009, p. 16). However, this was not the agreement made within the confessions at Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) but that "the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father" (Dulles 1995, pp. 31–32). As a result, this insertion was rejected by the Greek Eastern churches (Bromiley 1984), who also opposed Arianism (Blaising 1984), but insisted on stressing the full deity of the Holy Spirit (Moltmann 1981, p. 181). This main doctrinal bifurcation led to the great schism between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Western Roman Catholic Church in 1054 and has never been resolved officially with binding declarations (Moltmann 1981, pp. 178–80; 2014, pp. 35–36; Pless 2005, p. 116f; Siecienski 2010; New World Encyclopedia 2017).

3 It is noted that some other social trinitarian theologians, for example, Zizioulas (1995, pp. 50–55), interpret the three persons of God as a community of asymmetrical hierarchy (Volf 1998, pp. 76–81).

4 In the Eastern Orthodox theological tradition, theological anthropology is also based on a social trinitarian theology with these three elements: "person (hypostasis) … communion (koinonia)", and "nature (ousia)" (Bates 2012). However, for Moltmann (1981, pp. 188–89), it still supports a trinitarian structure of asymmetrical hierarchy because the Father is the "sole origin" of both the Son and the Holy Spirit (Zizioulas 1995, pp. 50–55; 2004, p. 45; Volf 1998, pp. 76–81). Insisting on the concept of "equally primary", Moltmann (1981, pp. 188–202) criticizes both the accounts of the Latin church tradition and the Eastern church tradition, which support "clerical monotheism" and "political monotheism" and have asymmetrical trinitarian structures.

5 The phrase *post-traditional Ru-influenced Chinese* is adopted in this paper to avoid the problem of ambiguity and generalization. The word "Ruism/Confucianism" is an ambiguous term, which can include a range of historical and contemporary meanings. This paper follows the general approach of Lauren Pfister (2015). Post-traditional Ru-influenced Chinese in this paper denotes "the small folk tradition" still influencing contemporary Chinese, as described by Shuhsien Liu 劉述先 (1934–2016) (Liu 1996a, p. 92), a contemporary New Ruist. This tradition that has existed for centuries and has been influenced by the other two main traditions, "the great tradition of the Ruist

refined intellectual spirit" and "the tradition of the Way expressed in politicized Ruism," is the mental habits and behavioural customs of most common Chinese people from ancient times to the present. It indicates looser and wider meanings of Ruism that cannot be interpreted by ordinary people themselves but must be done by researchers (Liu 1996b, p. 85). Confucianism or Ruism is often listed as part of the constellation of the three teachings (Buddhism, Daoism Confucianism), which are sometimes used as a shorthand for *Chinese religions*.

6 See also Jie Zhang et al. (2009, p. 187), Jie Zhang (2010, pp. 323–24), Jie Zhang et al. (2010, pp. 581–84), Fei Wu (2011a, pp. 213–19), Zhang and Li (2012, pp. 659–60), Yingyeh Chen et al. (2012, p. 139), Hyeon Jung Lee (2012), and Jie Zhang (2014, pp. 146, 151–52).

7 The term *non-Ruist scholars*, used in this paper, denotes those scholars whose academic disciplines are not mainly Ruist studies regardless of their ethnicity or nationality.

8 For example, Winnicott (1965, p. 133), June Ock Yum (1988, p. 386), Stephen K. K. Cheng (1990, p. 510), and Zhèngbó Zhèng 鄭正博 (Zheng 1990, p. 172). Due to the limitation of space and the focus of this paper, many other references to social science scholars and their relevant findings are not listed and discussed here. They can be found in detail in Tsung-I Hwang (2018, chp. Two and Appendix E).

9 Ames (2006, p. 520) states that the Ruist self is not an individualized self.

10 See also Zhongfang Yang (1991a, pp. 48–49; 1991b, p. 95) and Jiādòng Zhèng 鄭家棟 (Zheng 2003, p. 63).

11 See also Yiyin Yang (2008, p. 152) and Wenberng Pong 彭文本 (Pong 2009, p. 77).

12 There are many discussions on this phenomenon within the realm of contextual theology; a few notable examples among many include: Paul Fong 封尚禮 (Fong 1967, p. 50f, 79–81, 297), Willard G. Oxtoby (1933–2003) (Oxtoby 1983), Weiming Tu (1985), Toynbee and Ikeda (1989), Ching and Küng (1993, pp. 279–83), Thong and Fu (2009), Bǎoluó Huáng 黃保羅 (also as Paulos Huang) (Huang 2011), and David Marshall (2012).

13 Social trinitarian doctrine is not taught in most Chinese-speaking theological seminaries. Therefore, most Chinese evangelical ministers do not know it, let alone Chinese evangelical lay-Christians.

14 The author coined the phrase *gracious moral cultivation* to denote and explain the Christian theology of life-transforming development from imago Christi, in contrast with Ruist life transformation by oneself (moral self-cultivation) though *moral cultivation* is not a Christian theological term.

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Renewing the Narrative of the Age to Come: The Kingdom of God in NT Wright and John Zizioulas

Geoffrey Ready

Orthodox School of Theology at Trinity College, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON M5S 1H8, Canada; geoffrey.ready@utoronto.ca

Abstract: This paper makes use of leading New Testament scholar NT Wright's presentation of the biblical understanding of the kingdom to assess—on the basis of Orthodox Christian theologian John Zizioulas' own critique—the Orthodox liturgical enactment of the kingdom and age to come. We will explore how Wright and Zizioulas describe the principles of a properly kingdom-oriented worship. Finally, we will examine Wright's critical realism as a potential model for understanding how enacting the age to come in worship could shape the kingdom narrative of its participants. Thus, while Wright's immediate goal in his engagement of the theme of the kingdom of God may be to correct a longstanding misreading of the New Testament, his teaching ultimately enables us to propose a way of accomplishing Zizioulas' hope of renewing the full narrative of the age to come in Orthodox worship.

Keywords: Orthodox Christianity; liturgical theology; kingdom of God; narrative; critical realism

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1. Introduction

One is an evangelical Anglican, among the world's foremost New Testament scholars; the other is Orthodox, the nearest thing in eastern Christianity to a systematic theologian. Yet, both NT Wright and John Zizioulas share common concern about the loss of the eschatological dimension of Christian faith; both express the need to recover the fulness of the kingdom of God in Christian worship and life. Wright's overarching theme is that western Christian tradition has largely forgotten what the gospels are really about, namely, the "devastating and challenging" message of the advent of the kingdom of God and inauguration here and now of the age to come (Wright 2012, p. 37). As Zizioulas explains in many of his works, the same amnesia has impaired the celebration and understanding of Orthodox Christian worship—most particularly, the central act of worship, the Divine Liturgy—and dulled the impact of the devastating and challenging message of the kingdom on Orthodox believers. The Divine Liturgy has lost its power to shock, to announce the revolution consisting of the dethroning and reversal of the world's powers, the victory of God in Jesus, and the kingdom of God already present now in the fulness of the power of self-sacrificing love.

In this paper, we will use Wright's New Testament exegesis and presentation of the biblical understanding of the kingdom to assess—on the basis of Zizioulas' own critique—the Orthodox liturgical enactment of the kingdom and age to come. We will explore how Wright and Zizioulas describe the principles of a properly kingdom-oriented worship. Finally, we will examine Wright's critical realism as a potential model for understanding how enacting the age to come in worship could shape the kingdom narrative of its participants. Thus, while Wright's immediate goal in his engagement of the theme of the kingdom of God may be to correct a longstanding misreading of the New Testament, his teaching ultimately enables us to propose a way of accomplishing Zizioulas' hope of renewing the full narrative of the age to come in Orthodox worship.

2. The Kingdom of God in Zizioulas and Wright

2.1. The Missing Kingdom Narrative

Zizioulas follows liturgical theologians such as Alexander Schmemann in describing Orthodox Christian worship as eschatological, concretely symbolising our participation in the life of the age to come: it begins with "the invocation of the Kingdom, continues with the representation of it, and ends with our participation in the Supper of the Kingdom, our union and communion with the life of God in Trinity" (Zizioulas 2011, p. 39). Although it is "glaringly obvious" that the Divine Liturgy is an image of the kingdom of God, John Zizioulas laments the disappearance of the kingdom of God in Orthodox Christian consciousness "under the weight of other kinds of questions and other forms of piety" (ibid., p. 40). He notes that "our theology in recent years does not seem to have given appropriate weight to the eschatological dimension of the Eucharist" (ibid., p. 39)—clarifying elsewhere that by "in recent years" he means everyone since Maximus in the seventh century, and not a few before him! This loss of an eschatological consciousness has had "very grave consequences for the way the Liturgy is celebrated, the piety of the faithful and the whole life of the Church." It is a serious distortion of the Orthodox faith for "we are misled into notions alien to the true Orthodox tradition, often thinking that we are defending Orthodoxy, whereas in fact we are reproducing and promoting ideas foreign to its tradition" (ibid., p. 40).

Throughout his many works of New Testament scholarship, NT Wright echoes the same concern about the profound distortion of Christian faith that results from missing the eschatological dimension of the kingdom of God as a present and coming reality. Like Zizioulas, Wright insists that the full narrative is right in front of our eyes—in the gospels and other writings of the New Testament—but even the sincerest biblically grounded Christians miss it. The main cause of this blindness is an Enlightenment worldview founded on a split-level world similar to ancient Epicureanism: God lives in his heaven, away from human affairs on earth, and the goal of Christian faith becomes salvation conceived as ultimately escaping from this world and going to heaven. The result is a dichotomy between the sacred and secular, a focus on individual piety and salvation, and a reduction of the spiritual life to simply one strand of human existence. Through the lens of this distorted worldview, we miss the essential message of the kingdom of God and the whole of the gospel is reinterpreted. Even the "majestic creeds, full as they are of solemn truth and supple wisdom" prove to be of little use: written to safeguard against specific heresies, without a fuller liturgical and narrative context they do not expound the full story, let alone "the main thing the gospels are trying to tell us," and they even imply the kingdom only comes at the end of time (Wright 2012, p. 16). Echoing the grave consequences Zizioulas observes, Wright notes that this missing kingdom narrative affects everything, including "our discipleship, our preaching, our hermeneutics, and even our praying" (ibid., p. 20).

Wright and Zizioulas are agreed that Christians have strayed away from the eschatology of the early church and inadvertently fallen into a form of gnosticism or Platonism, "substituting 'souls going to heaven' for the promised new creation" (Wright 2016, p. 147). Wright points to the misunderstanding of ζωὴ αἰώνιος (literally "life of the age") as an everlasting life understood as "timeless heavenly bliss," rather than as the long-promised age to come in which God would decisively act to bring "justice, peace, and healing to the world as it groaned and toiled within the 'present age'" (Wright 2012, pp. 44–45). We need to realise instead that *heaven* is not our destined place outside of space and time, but it refers rather to "God's space" and earth to "our space" and that heaven and earth, "made from the start to overlap and interlock, did so fully and finally in Jesus" (Wright 2016, p. 162). The kingdom of heaven therefore means God's rule coming to earth—"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6.10, RSV)—not that good people will go in the future to some kind of disembodied heaven. For Wright, to screen out the inauguration in Jesus of God's kingdom coming on earth as in heaven is not only to adopt a form of gnostic detached spirituality rejected by the early church, but it also

leads us away from our true image-bearing vocation as humans to "live as worshipping stewards within God's heaven-and-earth reality" (ibid., p. 77).

Where Wright sees a creeping in of ancient errors under modern cultural worldviews unleashed by the Enlightenment, Zizioulas delves directly into the philosophical underpinnings of the missing kingdom narrative. As early as the third century, in authors such as Clement and Origen of Alexandria, Zizioulas sees the development of a Christian gnosticism in which salvation "no longer means the hope of a new world, with a new community and structure" but rather "purifying the soul so that it may be re-united with the Logos who is before all society and before the created and material world" (Zizioulas 2008, p. 129). Christianity is transformed from its purpose of gathering a community "imaging the future kingdom" (ibid., p. 130) into a matter of personal spirituality, of individual piety—the "going to heaven" business, Wright laments. For Zizioulas, this individualistic spirituality, which he admits has sadly dominated since the third century, is theologically and philosophically grounded in a view of causality that looks to what comes *before*, rather than to the *eschaton* and "the future recapitulation of human history" (ibid., p. 131). He turns to Maximus for the solution, for in the seventh century confessor he finds a renewed eschatology and emphasis on the future kingdom of God that radically overturns the Greek notion of causality (Zizioulas 2011, p. 42). Zizioulas refers to Maximus' *Scholia on Dionysius' Ecclesiastical Hierarchy,* in which Maximus follows Dionysius in calling the rites of the liturgy images (εικόνες) of what is true: they are "symbols," not "the truth," for "what is accomplished visibly" represents "the things that are unseen and secret, which are the causes and archetypes of things perceptible." In other words, the "perceptible symbols" are the effect, whereas the "noetic and spiritual" realities are the causes (ibid., p. 44). Zizioulas points out that at first blush this seems to fit that common reading in Orthodox thought in which the liturgy celebrated on earth is *symbolic*, imaging forth the true heavenly and eternal liturgy: "one seems to be moving in an atmosphere of Platonism." However, Maximus ends his passage on a surprising note, saying: "For the things of the Old Testament are the shadow; those of the New Testament are the image. The truth is the state of things to come." In this phrase, Zizioulas detects in Maximus a new philosophy of causality and an *eschatological ontology* in which the eucharistic liturgy and the church are founded neither in a cosmological past nor in a Platonic type of ideal reality, but "in a 'reality of the future', in the Kingdom which is to come" (ibid.). In other words, the "eschaton projects an image of itself backwards" (Zizioulas 2008, p. 137) and what is enacted in the Divine Liturgy is "*what is to come*, *He who comes*, and the *Kingdom* which He will establish" (Zizioulas 2011, p. 45).

For Zizioulas, Maximus' eschatological ontology restores the understanding of the church, constituted by the eucharistic assembly, as the image of the kingdom of God from a dangerously Platonic model to a solidly biblical one. Like Wright, Zizioulas is keen to resist and roll back the Platonising trends in Christian theology to return to a fully biblical eschatology and theology of the age to come. Despite the worrying developments in third century Alexandria and their ongoing distorting effect on Christian faith, for Zizioulas it is Maximus who ensures that the biblical understanding of the kingdom is "securely established on an ontological basis: the Eucharist is not simply connected with the Kingdom which is to come, it draws from it its being and truth" (Zizioulas 2011, p. 45). He therefore frequently laments that Christians approach worship without any eschatological awareness. He especially criticises Orthodox clergy who "dangerously distort" the Divine Liturgy's eschatological character and destroy "the 'image' of the Kingdom that the Liturgy is meant to be," saying that it "would take an entire volume to describe what our Liturgy has suffered at the hands of its clergy" (ibid., p. 46). With that grim warning in mind, we now turn to what Zizioulas and Wright describe as the principles of a properly kingdom-oriented worship.

2.2. Principles of Kingdom-Oriented Worship

NT Wright freely admits he is not a liturgist, but as a "New Testament scholar working in a community whose daily life is structured around public and corporate worship" (Wright 2002), he understands the centrality of worship in the kingdom-centred church. Worship, he says, is the "central characteristic of the heavenly life; and that worship is focused on the God we know in and as Jesus" (Wright 1997, p. 5). Understood in light of the kingdom of God, such worship is all-encompassing: the gospel summons us to life "as kingdom-people, reflecting God's image into the world. The way to that goal is worship: worship of the true, sovereign, creator God, Father, Son, and Spirit" (Wright 2002). Wright's vision of the centrality and kingdom-orientation of worship dovetails with the Orthodox Christian vision of liturgy as articulated by Zizioulas. The principles of his kingdom-based theology of worship may therefore complement—and even provide a more pragmatic footing for—the deeply philosophical eschatological liturgical theology of Zizioulas. We will explore here three principles of kingdom-oriented worship outlined by Zizioulas but elaborated by Wright: worship that celebrates the paradoxical climax of the story of Israel, worship that is properly Trinitarian, rejecting all false images of God, and worship that enacts the renewal of the human person, community, and world.

2.2.1. Worship That Celebrates the Paradoxical Climax of the Whole Narrative of Israel

Throughout his writings, Wright insists that the work of God in Jesus can only be understood as the climax of the story of Israel. Zizioulas too notes the primary importance of Israel, stating that the nation created from the seed of Abraham "is the source of the Messiah and his eschatological community" and that the church must be understood as the "new Israel" (Zizioulas 2008, p. 126). The church's self-understanding of imaging the kingdom of God in worship arises from the fulfilment of the promises of God and "the expectations of the people of Israel that the scattered people of God would be called together around the Messiah 'on the last day'" (ibid., pp. 127–28). This gathering of the "many into one" becomes one of Zizioulas' most cherished ecclesiological and eschatological themes. It is his central philosophical concept, but it does nevertheless have a certain *narrative* content: "One of the basic elements of the coming in the last days is the gathering of the scattered people of God—and by extension of all mankind—'in one place' around the person of the Messiah, in order for the judgement of the world to take place and the Kingdom of God to prevail" (Zizioulas 2011, p. 46). Linking this broad narrative picture directly to the worship of the age to come, he cites the beautiful description of the eucharist "as an image of the eschatological gathering of the scattered children of God" from the liturgy within the *Didache* (9.4)*:* "Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy Kingdom" (ibid., pp. 46–47). Tellingly, it is precisely the breakdown of this eschatological vision of the gathering of many into one that represents for Zizioulas the alienation of Orthodox worship from the kingdom-oriented liturgy of the early church. In his view, it "survives" (!) in the early second century in Ignatius, and as we have already seen, as late as the seventh century Maximus still calls the Divine Liturgy "synaxis" and image of "the state of things to come," but today the proliferation of eucharistic gatherings points to a distorted image of the "dispersal of the faithful" in stark contrast to the gathering in one place the Divine Liturgy is intended to symbolise (ibid., p. 47).

Where Zizioulas moves quickly from the broad canvas of the story of Israel to a philosophical framework of "many into one," in Wright we have an ongoing appreciation of the full narrative of Israel as the basis of the life of Jesus and subsequently Christian worship in light of the kingdom of God. In liturgy as in the gospels themselves, we have not merely a narrative embroidered with elements of the story of Israel, "detached themes and hints from long ago," but rather the "towering sense of *a single story now at last reaching its conclusion*" (Wright 2012, p. 72). Jesus' life is told by the evangelists in the context of an "unfinished narrative, an unfinished *agenda*" in which things were "supposed to happen

that haven't happened yet" (ibid., p. 66). In the context of the scriptures, the story is badly stalled: there had been "great beginnings and wonderful visions of God's plan and purposes, then a steady decline and puzzling and shameful multiple failures, all ending in a question mark." By the first century, the exile of the people of Israel was not properly over. Some had returned from Babylon, and a second temple had been built in Jerusalem, but they were ruled by pagan foreigners and were slaves in their own land, and the great promises of the prophets had not yet come true (ibid., p. 69). Wright outlines three specific expectations of Israel that would herald the day of the Lord and inauguration of the age to come: Israel would be freed from pagan rule, Israel's God would become "ruler of the world, bringing birth to a new reign of justice and peace," and thirdly, "God's own Presence would come to dwell with this people," enabling them—and with them all the nations of the world—to worship him fully and truly (Wright 2016, p. 160).

The faith and worship of the very earliest Christians grew directly from their conviction that in the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah Israel's God himself had arrived at last to renew and restore his people and fulfil this triple hope. Significantly, though, this was not at all as it had been imagined, and a key element of the kingdom in the early church is "*that it bursts upon Jesus's first followers as something so shocking as to be incomprehensible*" (Wright 2012, p. 197). This paradox lies at the heart of the New Testament: the evangelists and early apostolic writers insist that in Jesus the reality of the kingdom has been made present and Israel's God was already king of the world, though they require their readers to understand Israel's story and hopes in a new way. For Wright, the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24, 13–35) is paradigmatic of the revelation in true worship of this paradoxical fulfilment of Israel's hope. The disciples, who had been longing for the redemption of Israel by Jesus and whose hopes had been dashed by his death, are led to an event of joyful revelation in the opening of the scriptures and the breaking of bread, that is, in a liturgical event of word and sacrament. Wright points especially to the fact that Christ interprets for the disciples "*all* the scriptures" (Luke 24, 27)—in other words, true revelation and worship involves the *whole* narrative that, "like the risen Jesus himself, is visible to the eye of faith. The story makes sense as a whole or not at all" (ibid., p. 77).

For Wright, the worship of the church must be "soaked" in the whole narrative of Israel as set out in the scriptures so that we "worship in a way which is both sign and means of new creation" (Wright 2017). This worship is "dramatic, performative, setting out and celebrating God's story with the world": the biblical narrative is "a great drama, a great saga, a play written by the living God and staged in his wonderful creation" and in liturgy "we become for a moment not only spectators of this play but also willing participants in it" (Wright 2002). Though, as noted above, he places far less importance on the narrative itself, Zizioulas nevertheless concurs with kingdom-oriented worship being an enacted celebration of God's climactic intervention in history: the story, sacraments and images of liturgy "are created as the Holy Spirit draws us and all our history into relationship with the end time, the reconciliation of all partial kingdoms in the true history of the kingdom of God" (Zizioulas 2008, p. 153). For Zizioulas, this links directly to the *anamnesis* embodied particularly in the eucharistic liturgy, the remembrance—by participation *now* in the eschaton—of all time and all kingdoms, of the truth of the world, and "not only of past events, but also of future 'events', i.e., of the Kingdom of God as the culmination of the whole history of salvation" (Zizioulas 2011, p. 41).

2.2.2. Trinitarian Worship That Rejects Idolatry, Ideology, Dualism and Individualism

The second principle of kingdom-oriented worship is that it be properly *Trinitarian*. This principle is famously one of the hallmarks of Zizioulas' theology: it is in the image of the triune God that the church participates now through the eucharist in the gathering of the many into one in the kingdom. Both the church and the eucharist represent communion (κοινωνία), a Trinitarian way of being; the Trinity is a communion of divine persons that gathers into the kingdom all dispersed human persons and reveals to them a new relational

way of life, a living for the other (Zizioulas 2010, p. 52). Due to the triune God's desire to have communion with the whole of creation, this living for the other extends also to creation "in its non-human form" (ibid., p. 57). In this way, worship of the true God in Trinity is a turning away, not only from false gods (idolatry) and faiths and worldly powers (ideology), but an overcoming of the dichotomy between spirit and matter (dualism) and the fallen human tendency to live for oneself rather than the other (individualism).

Wright elaborates these same themes in his own exploration of worship within the kingdom of God. His starting point, following the line of thinking in Paul's Epistle to the Romans, is that the essential problem of human existence is not sin, but *idolatry*: it is "a failure of worship, which leads to, but is itself deeper than, the multiple failures of human living" (Wright 2002). This emerges from the central biblical narrative of the *temple*, sweeping from creation to the eschaton, wherein God's purpose is to unite heaven and earth and dwell with his people, and the vocation of the image-bearing human being is to freely offer his love, thanksgiving and praise on behalf of all creation. For this worship to be true, however, it must obviously be "the true God you're worshipping" (Wright 1997, p. 7). This was precisely the conflict gripping the entire history of Israel, a struggle of Israel's true God against the pagan deities and tyrants of the world. Over and again, the prophets call Israel to turn from idolatry and return to worship of the true God. Not insignificantly, this clash of the kingdoms—the kingdoms of the tyrants of this world versus the kingdom of the true God to be revealed in the age to come—is especially expounded in the *messianic* prophecies of Isaiah 40-55 and Daniel, which early Christians saw fulfilled in Jesus.

The distinctively Christian Trinitarian theology of worship emerges directly from Jewish monotheism and its confrontation with idolatry, including pagan polytheism, imperial ideology, and dualism. Worship of the true God is a complete reversal and overthrow of the darkness of idolatry; founded in the death and resurrection of Jesus, it is a "deathblow to the dark forces that had stood in the way of God's new world, God's 'kingdom' of powerful creative and restorative love, arriving 'on earth as in heaven'" (Wright 2012, p. 246). Wright points out the corporate nature of this reversal: all too often in our post-Enlightenment western world we are quick to individualise Christianity and grasp at the personal meaning of *repentance* and *forgiveness*, but in doing so we miss the "breathtaking sweep" of the advent of God's kingdom: "Jesus's followers are to go out into the world equipped with the power of his own Spirit to announce *that a new reality has come to birth*, that its name is 'forgiveness,' and that it is to be had by turning away from idolatry ('repentance')" (Wright 2016, p. 384). At the core of Christian worship is the celebration of this new reality. As Wright says, all those who join in with our worship "ought to be able to sense that living rhythm, that longer vision, that larger horizon of promise" of the fulfilment of God's kingdom (Wright 2017). Even though it will be "complicated, contested, and controversial," we need to continually strive to proclaim in worship and life "the forgiveness of sins and the consequent breaking of the enslaving powers" and the dethroning of all the world's kingdoms (Wright 2016, p. 394). In its place, we do not set another kingdom of the same sort, but we labour for the kingdom "whose power is the power of the servant and whose strength is the strength of love" (Wright 2012, p. 205).

Like Zizioulas, Wright observes that the life of communion of the divine persons of the triune God provides the *model* for Christian worship. As knowing is defined in relation to its object, "so worship, as a mode of knowing and/or being known, is defined by its object: the God whom we worship." Therefore, the Holy Trinity of Father, Son, and Spirit "is himself in his threefold unity the means and the pattern of our worship" (Wright 2002). United to the Son in an offering of sacrifice and praise to the Father, enabled by the Spirit who calls "forth worship of the Father through the Son," Christians take their place in true kingdom worship that takes place at once in heaven and on earth: in the temple of the body of Christ that unites heaven and earth. Zizioulas notes that the worship around the throne of God and the Lamb depicted in Revelation 4 and 5 corresponds to the "structure of the eucharistic gathering as described to us clearly from the earliest sources" (Zizioulas 2011, p. 17). For Wright as well, the portrayal of heavenly worship in

Revelation in which we take our place "amongst all the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven" is normative for all worship: and this "is not a vision of the ultimate future—that comes in chapters 21 and 22—but of the heavenly dimension of *present* reality" (Wright 2002). One of the key functions of kingdom worship is that it enables us *to see things as they really are*, to grasp within our present sphere the heaven-and-earth unity inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Jesus: it is "in prayer, in scripture study, in the sacraments and in working for God's kingdom in the world" that we "sense fitfully" the heaven-and-earth overlap of the kingdom (Wright 2016, p. 148). This is at heart a Trinitarian action: "Heaven is not a long way away. It is where Jesus and the Spirit are, revealing the Father and drawing us into worship, love, and obedience." Wright explains that in Revelation 4, the expressions used by the apostle, "coming up to heaven" and "being in the Spirit," mean the same thing: "heaven and earth are the interlocking spheres of God's single creation, and when John is 'in the spirit,' he is suddenly open to and aware of the heavenly dimension of what we call ordinary life" (Wright 2002).

2.2.3. Worship Oriented towards the Renewal and Restoration of All

Out of this Trinitarian object and shape of worship arises our third principle, that the worship of the one true God in the age to come is oriented towards the renewal of image-bearing human beings in community, for the restoration of the whole world. For Zizioulas, the restored communal life of the kingdom is patterned on the life of the Trinity; by uniting the many into one, the eucharistic community reveals this Trinitarian kingdom, our "ultimate reality" and the "future to us in the form of the present" (Zizioulas 2008, p. 137). To take part in the "community of the end of times," we must become church, because it is "the Church that reflects the transformation of the entire material world and with it all human society and community" (ibid., p. 135). In its eschatological worship, the church reconciles and unites all creation in Christ, and already participates in the uncreated light and glory of God. Though it draws its very existence from the end, however, the church is nevertheless in constant *progression* towards that end. Zizioulas laments that—in the predominant Platonic view that sees the earthly liturgy as the image of an *ideal* heavenly liturgy without reference to time—the Divine Liturgy has come to be viewed as static, whereas it should be understood as both the dynamic *journey to* the kingdom and the proleptic *coming of* the kingdom (Zizioulas 2011, p. 48). This ongoing progression of the church, he says, lies along a narrow path in which the kingdom is being realised within it. As the life of the age to come *already is*, it is not a matter for kingdom worship to simply depict this life by way of "parable or allegory"; rather, it is "the symbolism of an *icon* as that is understood by the Fathers of the Church," meaning that the church participates directly "in the *ontological content* of the prototype" (ibid., p. 50). The liturgy of the age to come reveals the overcoming of evil and defeat of the devil, and "the future of the world, in which both society and all material creation overcome corruption" (Zizioulas 2008, p. 135). This experience of participating in the end reveals a new way of being in which we live no longer according to the present evil age but, by the power of the Holy Spirit, according to the life of the kingdom to come. This new participative eschatological ontology heals our distorted relations for we know each other, not as *we have been*, as sinful, self-centred individuals, but as *we will be* in the glorious life of communion of the age to come, and it therefore leads to new actions and new witness within the world.

Wright mirrors Zizioulas in emphasising the transformative character of worship, though as ever he bases this more deeply in the scriptural narrative of the kingdom and on biblical imagery than systematic theology and ecclesiology. Worship is intended to be the primary means by which God's temple project outlined in Genesis is taken forward. It is worship that makes us human: it is what we were created for, the purpose of our image-bearing, and it is the "truly human stance" (Wright 2002). Jesus Christ himself, in his true humanity, fulfils and renews the image of God and becomes the "source, model, and goal or our own becoming truly human." In Jesus a new mode of being human is established, founded in self-sacrificing love and forgiveness, and it is in worship that this

new way of being human is acquired, for "we not only become like the God we see in Jesus Christ, but we reflect this God in our own lives and to the people and places where we are placed." Indeed, true worship is the real world, Wright says, echoing Zizioulas; it is the ultimate basis of human reality. It is precisely as we worship the triune God that we make "real what is true of us through baptism and faith, whereby we become living members of the Jesus Christ who in his perfect manhood offers to the Father that love, obedience, and loyalty which is the true human vocation" (ibid.).

For Wright, this true kingdom worship should lead directly to living here and now the signs of that new world. Liturgically, those signs are the sacraments, and above all the eucharist, through which all of creation can become the signposts of God's new heaven-and-earth creation, and in which "symbols of the natural world become vehicles of the heavenly world, of which we are called to be citizens" (Wright 1997, p. 11). Alongside the sacraments, though, another of the key signs of the new kingdom is that worship find expression in active political and social engagement, in which we are "urged and encouraged to celebrate the lordship of Jesus Christ over the whole creation, in anticipation of the day when at his name every knee shall bow" (Wright 2002). By contrast, Zizioulas admits that the church's "eschatological dimension has a public outworking," but he is minded that it not involve itself in organised social outreach and its secular administrative systems: avoiding the extremes of "quietism" and political engagement, he argues for "unforced person-to-person charity" reflecting the kingdom's personal encounter and love, which "must always be free" (Zizioulas 2008, p. 127).

2.3. Renewing the Narrative of the Age to Come

As we have seen in their description of kingdom-oriented worship, both John Zizioulas and NT Wright emphasise the indispensable role of worship in the experience here and now of the life of the age to come, and they both clearly teach that liturgy shapes people for the kingdom. For Zizioulas, the key to participating in the kingdom is an awareness of eschatological identity, an understanding that true causality is the future not the past, and that the true nature of all people and things is what they will be in the age to come (Zizioulas 2010, p. 15). This knowledge is itself transformative, allowing human beings to fulfil their image-bearing vocation to be kingdom-builders: the "more of your eschatological identity you carry with you, the more you will love and come to the aid of whomever needs your help, whatever it costs you" (Zizioulas 2008, p. 32). Apart from insisting on our iconological participation in the eschaton through the Divine Liturgy, however, Zizioulas never articulates in any practical way how awareness of this eschatological identity is to be acquired, how eschatological ontology works through worship to make us into people who belong in and derive their being from the age to come. A pragmatic solution is sorely needed, though: we have already seen just how scathingly he decries clergy who, lacking the proper eschatological awareness, have turned the liturgy into "a distortion of the image of the last times" (Zizioulas 2011, p. 46).

Throughout this paper, we have seen that, while sharing Zizioulas' concern for the dearth of awareness among Christians of an experience here and now of the new way of life of the age to come, Wright perceives the real solution will come with the recovery the full kingdom *narrative*. He emphasises that it is in the telling of the *story* that the work of God in Jesus to establish his kingdom becomes the "mandate and pattern" for the church: "The more you tell the story of Jesus and pray for his Spirit, the more you discover what the church should be doing in the present time" (Wright 2012, p. 119). What Wright says of the gospels could equally be said of the kingdom worship of the Orthodox Divine Liturgy: the story has a "dense and complex centre," and we need to regularly "be struck anew by the thick, rich, multilayered nature" of this narrative, "so full of vivid human scenes, but so evocative in their resonance of meaning about the world, God, life and death, and pretty much everything else" (ibid., p. 157). In the telling of God's story in worship, there is the potential for the transforming encounter and renewal of our minds that we need:

> God has to sweep away all our ideas, including all our ideas about God, in order to draw us, unwilling as we are, face to face with the reality, which is both greater and gentler than we can imagine. And if that is true in our praying and thinking—if it is true that we have to be stripped of our own noisy jumble of thoughts in order to hear afresh the word of the triune God—it is just as true in our living. (Wright 1997, p. 38)

In liturgy, then, God's story shapes our own, the narrative of the age to come moulding us to be citizens and bringers of the kingdom.

The difficulty, of course, is that as Zizioulas and Wright have both identified, it is possible to participate in liturgy or read the gospels and completely miss the clear and overarching narrative of the kingdom that pervades the Christian story. As Wright points out, we have cut the narrative "down to size" and have allowed it "only to speak about the few concerns that happened to occupy our minds already," rather than setting it "free to generate an entire world of meaning in all directions, a new world in which we would discover not only new life, but new vocation." What occupy our minds already are competing narratives that create what Wright calls "bad habits of thought" (Wright 2012, p. 158). These result in perception filters that blind us to even the most obvious elements of God's story, in cognitive biases or subjective perceptions of reality that distort our apprehension of the truths revealed in the narrative and experienced in worship. Wright lays the blame primarily on worldviews arising from a triad of cultural movements over successive centuries—the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and existentialism—that have severely distorted our lenses and prevented us from engaging fully with God's story. As we have already seen, the Enlightenment, "with its ugly ditch between ideas and facts, the eternal truths of reason and the contingent events of history," split religion from real life, divorcing heaven from earth, and subtly pushed the privatisation of faith (Wright 2002). The church swallowed this rhetoric and became content to sell its faith as a means of individuals qualifying for some kind of supratemporal and immaterial heaven after death. Romanticism further distorted the picture by privileging feelings over thoughts and deeds, focusing on the heart, not in the biblical sense as the seat of will and real, personal knowledge, but as the seat of fickle emotions: "it invited you to look within, to see what feelings you had, and to make them the centre of your world, rather than seeing the love of the heart for the true God as the gift of God through gospel, Word, and Spirit." Thirdly, Wright sees the existentialist movements of the 20th century as a blatant return to a form of gnosticism: each of us "has inside ourselves a true self which, though long buried, is now to be discovered and enabled to flourish." This leaves no room for anyone to be confronted, challenged and transformed by the gospel, for it says we need, not redemption, but "to be helped to discover 'who you really are'" (ibid.) These cultural lenses have profoundly affected our ability to read and understand God's story, whether written in the scriptures or proclaimed in liturgy. To these distorted lenses, we can also add the imagination-warping dangers of "secular liturgies" such as consumerism. Within our modern life, countless narrative spaces call us to enter in and participate; these stories and spaces form our desires and imaginations, and they alienate us from the kingdom narrative of our true human existence.

In the face of these challenges and competing narratives, it is not adequate simply to declare that liturgy proclaims the new life of the kingdom and forms our "eschatological identity." What we need is a model for the way the liturgy of the kingdom works in practice as a counter-formative influence. We need to understand how participants in kingdom-oriented worship may be converted from the distorted narratives of the present age and begin to apprehend the full divine narrative—how through the words and actions of the liturgy they may begin to imagine and live the way God desires. In NT Wright's comprehensive understanding of the way narrative itself works, the foundation of his own New Testament scholarship, we may discern and adapt just such a model.

In his New Testament studies, Wright sets out a hermeneutical model called "critical realism." Unlike Enlightenment positivism's detached and objective observer, critical

realism submits that the observer has a distinctive *point of view*, that the observer interprets through a matrix of expectations, memories, stories, and psychological states, and that the observer's interpretive lenses arise from the communities and contexts belonged to. Rather than working from observations and sensory data to "confident statements about external reality" as in positivism, here realism survives "within the larger framework of the story or worldview which forms the basis of the observer's way of being in relation to the world" (Wright 1993, p. 37). Knowledge takes place "when people *find things that fit* with the particular story or (or more likely) stories to which they are accustomed to give allegiance." As Wright explains, stories "are one of the most basic modes of human life" (ibid., p. 38). Narratives are not accounts derived from human words and action: rather, what we say and do are "enacted narratives." In other words, "the overall narrative is the more basic category, while the particular moment and person can only be understood within that context." All of our life is based on the overt and hidden narratives that we tell ourselves and one another. Together, they form what critical-realist theoretician Michael Polanyi calls "tacit knowledge," the precognitive filter that enables to sort out what new sensory data and ideas are to be believed. As story-telling humans, we inhabit a story-laden world; our observations, embedded within narratives, are challenged by critical reflection on ourselves as story-tellers, but with new or revised stories we can find "alternative ways of speaking truly about the world" (ibid., p. 44).

This critical-realist framework suggests how kingdom-oriented liturgy may work in practice to shape participants with what should be its "devastating and challenging" narrative. As story-laden creatures, we all come to worship bearing our own complex of explicit and implicit narratives. We are often not aware of them at all, for we have not stopped to perform any *narrative criticism* on our own lives—we have yet to ponder the plot, the structure, the characters of the stories in which we inhabit. In the readings from the scriptures, the ritual actions and prayers, the liturgy of the kingdom presents us with a myriad of sensory data, ideas and symbols, story-laden events derived from the new life of the age to come. The stories and worldview embedded in the liturgy are meant to subvert all competing stories, for they are in essence revolutionary, proclaiming the dethroning and reversal of all tyrannical powers, the victory of God in Jesus that transforms sorrow into joy, darkness into light, and death into life. As Wright explains, this narrative-shaping role of worship is intentional:

> Stories are, actually, peculiarly good at modifying or subverting other stories and their worldviews. Where head-on attack would certainly fail, the parable hides the wisdom of the serpent behind the innocence of the dove, gaining entrance and favour which can then be used to change assumptions which the hearer would otherwise keep hidden away for safety. [. . .] Tell someone to do something, and you change their life—for a day; tell someone a story and you change their life. (Wright 1993, p. 40)

Yet, we are almost completely oblivious and immune to this subversive message if there is no point of intersection between our complex of personal stories and the public narrative of the liturgy. Our existing tacit knowledge or matrix of stories prevents us from even seeing the obvious symbol system of the kingdom that pervades the liturgy. For any new story to be subversive, it must come "close enough to the story already believed by the hearer for a spark to jump between them," and when it does, "nothing will ever be quite the same again" (ibid.).

Much of what liturgy needs to address lies beneath the surface in the deeply embedded implicit stories and tacit knowledge that people hold. These deeper stories may be precisely the source of the filters that prevent us from seeing in liturgy the obvious narrative and symbol set of the kingdom of God, yet they may not easily be addressed with explicit teaching. Drawing directly on the critical realism and related ideas of Michael Polanyi, Susan Wood calls the kind of knowledge that liturgy gives us access to *participatory knowledge*: "we acquire this knowledge by entering into the symbolic time and space of liturgical action. Within the liturgy we enter a formative environment that shapes our

vision, our relationships, and our knowing" (Wood 2001, pp. 95–96). She explains that this form of knowledge is less rational, and more kinaesthetic, incarnate and embodied. Great emphasis must therefore be placed on participation in liturgy—not strictly speaking, on a rational level, but on the rituals, movement and embodied action by which we dwell within the liturgy. This is what James Smith also emphasises in his works on worship: repeated bodily practices, whether they be the liturgy or our secular rituals, create narrative spaces which shape our imagination, desires and character far more than we are consciously aware (Smith 2013). For Smith, so important is ritual action that even the imagination becomes a bodily form of intelligence (or *praktognosia*) that surpasses conscious reflection, and the mind seems only to be involved in organising thoughts after the real work is done. A balanced view of worship should see the liturgy as a place of dialogue between body and mind, of embodied imagination and values repatterned by ritual practice, and of conscious theological reflection on the participative, tacit knowledge perceived within the in-dwelt *whole*.

The narrative of the kingdom of God as inaugurated in the paschal mystery is precisely that *whole* within which we dwell in liturgy. To function properly as a narrative that shapes the participants in liturgy, it is therefore essential that the story of God's kingdom be fully proclaimed within worship. In liturgical proclamation and ritual enactment, the texts of the scriptures move from being literary narratives to being the typological interpretation of the events of salvation present in the life of the eucharistic community; they recount the transformation taking place within it, and the community assumes the story as their own. In this way, the narrative content of liturgy begins to work as an interpretive lens for our life, and it becomes what Polanyi describes as an interiorised faculty of tacit knowledge, much like the knowledge of a language or a tool, bestowing meaning on the world. Wright himself specifically says that the proclamation of the scriptures in liturgy is not primarily about teaching or "to impart information," but to "acclaim and celebrate God's mighty acts" (Wright 2017). He underscores the dynamic sacramental and prophetic role of the scriptures in worship, and laments that the whole narrative is seldom told, that many congregations are not even aware of the story of the kingdom. The story is "so explosive," he believes, that "the church in many generations has found it too much to take and so has watered it down, cut it up into little pieces, turned it into small-scale lessons rather than allowing its full impact to be felt" (Wright 2012, p. 276). Renewal of the liturgy as an event in which we can be shaped by the proclamation of the word and in which it becomes a tacit interpretive lens for our lives depends necessarily on the renewal of the lectionary, an initiative frequently raised as an issue needing urgent attention within Orthodox liturgical celebration. Wright makes a number of proposals that may be of use to Orthodox Christians, including reading longer sections to provide narrative context to lections, providing space within liturgy for continual reading (including of whole books, more often than just during Orthodox holy week), and interspersing reading with prayer, for instance praying "Our Father" after each chapter or section of a gospel (ibid. pp. 274–75). He also suggests that homilists take care to allow shorter readings within liturgy to become "windows on the larger narrative." In this way, he says, the scriptures may "provide fuel for the sacrificial flame which burns in our hearts, to bring us into the true Temple; to point ahead to God's new world and, by anticipating that new world in the present, actually to contribute by the Spirit to its effective realization" (Wright 2017).

3. Conclusions

The liturgical theologian Gordon Lathrop once said that the point of Christian worship is "to say the truth about God." Both John Zizioulas and NT Wright have allocated a considerable amount of their writing to arguing that this truth about God, for many reasons, has not been fully told. Over many centuries, the core scriptural narrative of the kingdom of God has been obscured or altogether lost, and the central Christian hope for the new world in which heaven and earth are for ever united has been transformed into a neo-gnostic expectation of private spiritual escape.

The approach taken in this paper may be best conceived as a form of Venn diagram, exploring the issues of common concern between Zizioulas and Wright, intentionally seeking to read them both charitably and selectively in light of each other's work and to construct a dialogue between them, rather than subjecting them to a more thoroughgoing or harsher critical evaluation. As is the case for most prophetic voices, such critiques abound, and further comparative studies of our authors may well shed useful light on what their critics have written about them.

It is also worth remembering that, beyond this overlapping interest in the eclipse of the kingdom narrative, Zizioulas and Wright operate in very different theological spheres. As one of Orthodox Christianity's leading and most influential theologians, Zizioulas is known in the west primarily for his landmark work, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, as close to a work of philosophical or systematic theology as one can find in contemporary Orthodox theology, and one far less immediately grounded in either liturgical renewal or scriptural narrative, which is why it has not been focused on in this paper. A future paper could show, nevertheless, how this most well known of Zizioulas' works does still emerge from and reflect this core concern for the recovery of an underlying narrative of the age to come.

For his part, and though as a New Testament scholar he has naturally focused his attention on addressing the forgotten story of the kingdom within biblical studies, Wright is as explicitly committed as Zizioulas to a renewal of worship to express fully the story of the kingdom. They are, after all, both bishops as well as scholars. Both want a full recovery of the eschatological vision of the early church, and the restitution of a kingdom-oriented worship that conveys the world-upending message of the kingdom and shapes believers to participate now in the life of the age to come. Where Zizioulas tends towards a more systematic treatment of their shared concern and calls Orthodox Christians to recover the eschatological identity already embedded within the Divine Liturgy, Wright complements him with a profound treatment of the story of the kingdom as proclaimed through the life-giving words of the sacred scriptures. Wright's critical-realist epistemology completes the picture by pointing us towards the practical measures we can take to ensure that this story transforms us within the liturgy of the kingdom.

We inhabit a world of formative influences, in which a lifetime of individualistic consumerism, let alone a drift back into Platonic or gnostic variants of Christian faith, leaves its mark on our imagination and bends us away from God and his kingdom. The Christian answer to this challenge is simply to hear and live a *story*: "It is a love story—God's love story, operating through Jesus and then, by the Spirit, through Jesus's followers. This is the building of the church against which the powers of hell, and for that matter deconstruction, cannot prevail" (Wright 2012, p. 241). On the centrality and formative power of the narrative of God's kingdom, Wright and Zizioulas are firmly agreed, though in their prophetic articulation of this, each has faced some measure of controversy and opposition in their respective traditions, a fuller treatment of which lies outside the scope of this present paper. We may nevertheless hope that, by bringing these two scholars into constructive dialogue, their collective invitation to a full, participatory knowledge of this story of the kingdom of God may be heard by all Christians.

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