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**Scripture and Tradition: An Evangelical View**

I often recommend Ernst Benz's excellent introduction to Eastern Orthodoxy because he begins his book with the an explanation of the icon. "Any Western observer of an Orthodox service will immediately notice the special importance the pictures of saints have for the Orthodox believer."[[1]](#footnote-1) He discusses not only the icons in the church building but the veneration of icons in the believer's home.[[2]](#footnote-2) What I appreciate about Benz's approach is it deals with what is most striking to those unacquainted with the Orthodox Church.

I would hope someone describing Evangelicalism would make a similar statement regarding the prominence of the Bible in Evangelical worship and in the homes of believers. In some Evangelical Churches a large Bible is displayed on the communion table, but even those that don't display the Bible will have copies in the pews for visitors to use. Evangelicals bring their own Bibles with them to services. Many churches keep a supply of Bibles on hand to give away. Much of Evangelical worship centers around the Bible in that the hymns and modern praise songs have Biblical themes. As a new convert I was impressed how hymns almost always referenced a verse of Scripture which inspired the stanzas. During the service one feature will be the public reading of the Bible, often the section on which the sermon is based. The practice of a daily "quiet time," devoted to reading a portion of Scripture and praying over the insights gained, is a long engrained habit.[[3]](#footnote-3) Evangelicals are Bible reading people.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The Bible is also used extensively in Orthodox worship. Demetrios Constantelos analyzed the most frequently celebrated liturgical texts for Scriptural phrases and allusions. He found that of the seven services he used in his study, "more than twenty-five percent of the services are made of Scriptural material. With the allusions and the Biblical proper names the percentage is still higher."[[5]](#footnote-5) Georges Barrios examined the various readings used in the services in his *Scripture Readings in Orthodox Worship.[[6]](#footnote-6)* This, therefore, is not a contest between Orthodox and Evangelicals to see who refers to the Bible more often.

Rather we are looking at the function of the Bible in Evangelicalism. The prominence of the Bible in liturgy or in a service does not explain its role. Instead, we need to look beyond the public phenomenon, which admittedly is similar or perhaps even greater in Orthodoxy from the studies just cited. How is the Bible used in determining what is to be believed and how is that belief structure apprehended by Evangelicals?

All Evangelical confessional statements and creeds refer to the authority of the Bible in determining doctrine. Often prefaced by adjectives such as the "ultimate" authority or the "infallible" authority, the unique place accorded to the Bible is a fundamental characteristic of Evangelicals. What does this mean in practice? We will discuss below how Evangelical tradition fits into that understanding. But it is important to understand that the Bible is seen as the key authority for the Evangelical faith.

How did it come to have such a position? To answer that, we need to go back to the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century and the Reformation slogan, "*sola Scriptura."*  By this phrase, the Reformers testified to the primacy of Scripture in determining the rule of faith, as opposed to what they saw as the traditions of men that had crept into the Church. The first Protestants saw themselves as Reformers not Rebels. They wanted to restore the Roman Catholic Church to its purity which they viewed as having been lost.

A prime example of how this worked out is found in the German priest and theology professor, Martin Luther, and his protest of the selling of indulgences. As you know, on All Saints Eve, October 31, 1517, Luther issued a list of debating points, *The Ninety Five Theses*, to discuss what he saw as unbiblical practices of the Church of Rome.[[7]](#footnote-7) To raise money to finish building St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, Pope Leo X issued a papal Bull authorizing the sale of indulgences. These indulgences were not for the remission of the guilt of sin which is covered by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, but for reduction of the temporal punishment of sin. In the medieval mind, the removal of guilt was one thing, but the need for penance was another.[[8]](#footnote-8) They were taught that the need to complete their purification kept souls in Purgatory.[[9]](#footnote-9)

This concept went against Luther's great discovery in the Bible of salvation by faith alone, *sola fide*.[[10]](#footnote-10) Luther saw in Scripture not only remission from the guilt of sin but from the temporal punishment of sin. Luther had suffered from his terror of the wrath of God. He was freed from his anxiety when he discovered the free gift of God was to be declared righteous.[[11]](#footnote-11) The Bible was the key that Luther used to unlock salvation for his congregation. He was first of all a pastor who had concern for the spiritual well being of his flock.

The 16th century Reformers insisted that doctrine be based on the clear teaching of Scripture. Their affirmation of the primacy of Scripture was not a denial of all tradition as they accepted the Ecumenical Creeds. They reserved the right, however, to test all creeds and confessions against the Bible. While most elements of Roman Catholic tradition claimed a connection to the Bible, the Reformers insisted that all tradition be found in the plain meaning of Scripture and it not contradict other Biblical passages.[[12]](#footnote-12)

The question therefore hinges on how the meaning of Scripture is determined.[[13]](#footnote-13) While a full discussion of hermeneutics is broader than the scope of our paper, we can affirm that the Reformers sought to first discover what the author intended to convey to the original audience and then to interpret the meaning to their own time. Contemporary Evangelical hermeneutics functions in the same manner.[[14]](#footnote-14) With more cultural and archeological data available to us, we are in a better position to understand the world of the original hearers.[[15]](#footnote-15) What is termed the historical-grammatical method takes into account the original context and language of a text and then makes the appropriate translation to the present day hearer. We want to discover the meaning of a passage to the original audience, determine the doctrinal and practical teaching and then make the application to contemporary hearers.

Two questions arise when we consider the original audience. The first: were they able to grasp the full meaning of the text? Is there a *sensus plenior,* a fuller meaning of the text?[[16]](#footnote-16) The second, closely related to the first: can a text speak to a contemporary hearer in a way the original hearer would not have thought of?[[17]](#footnote-17)

As to whether there is a *sensus plenior,* some would adduce from I Peter 1: 10-12 that the prophets did not fully comprehend what they were writing.[[18]](#footnote-18) But these verses do not admit a hidden meaning as the key term here is "fully." The writers referred to by Peter understood the broad context, e.g. it spoke of the Christ to come, but not the exact timing.[[19]](#footnote-19) They knew they were writing of the salvation promised by God but "searched intently and with the greatest care trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the suffering of Christ and the glories that would follow" (verses 10-11, NIV)[[20]](#footnote-20) The Evangelical position on *sensus plenior* is that the Scripture must be seen and understood as a whole, the progressive revelation of God's plan of salvation which is clear as we read of the accomplished work of Christ.[[21]](#footnote-21)

This is a good place to introduce a theme to which we will return, namely, that we accept the Scriptures as the final authority because in them we find the Living Christ. Not merely a dogmatic text, the Bible is the living word of God because the Holy Spirit testifies to us of the Christ.

The second question as to whether the Bible speaks, apart from historical-grammatical exegesis, to the believer who is reading his or her Bible devotionally must be answered in the affirmative. This does not mean every time a believer reads the Bible the words of the text "jump out" and speak to her or his particular situation. I have counseled too many Christians who have admitted their devotional reading is sometimes dry, dull and without a sense of the Spirit's presence. Evangelicals do not believe that the Bible is a magic text that works merely by reading the correct formula as one might do in a book of spells.[[22]](#footnote-22)

On the other hand, I have spoken to many individuals for whom a passage has come alive with a special meaning as if God was speaking directly to them. I confess that I have had the same experience when a passage seems to speak to me. This is not to be equated with a new revelation of doctrine. Rather it is similar, though on a deeper level, to a friend saying something to us that strikes us as a pertinent word at that time.

When God speaks to us in our devotional reading of the Bible and is testified to by the Holy Spirit, it is a gift from God, a sign of God's love and provision. Expressions such as "It was just what I needed to hear" or "I felt such peace" indicate how the Holy Spirit ministers to us. These instances are expressions of God's personal care.

Closely connected to the devotional reading of the Bible is the right to read the Bible for oneself to see if it really says what the religious teachers claim. The perspicuity or clarity of the Bible means that using a good translation in the person's mother tongue will lead to an understanding of the gift of God's salvation. While scholars can spend a lifetime studying the nuances of the original languages, the main salvation themes are clear to an average reader. The Holy Spirit is active in leading the believer into all truth, but the main themes are apprehended by any honest reader.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Private reading, however, does not mean private interpretation. It is not an Evangelical principle that anyone can read the Bible and find anything they want in the text. This is not a reader-response hermeneutic but a hermeneutic read in community. In our case, that community is the entire church, both "militant" and "triumphant", that is, the church on earth and in heaven. We stand in a tradition of interpretation that goes beyond our own reading. I need to say more on hermeneutical traditions below, but suffice it to say here that the duty of the believer is to read the whole Bible with the whole Church.

Reading Scripture is so important that believers risked their lives to translate God's word. One only needs to think of John Wycliffe in the 14th century whose bones were dug up and burned for his advocacy of translating the Bible into English.[[24]](#footnote-24) Or William Tyndale who suffered a more painful way of having his bones burned when he was executed at the stake for his translation work.[[25]](#footnote-25) Tyndale's work formed the basis of the King James Version fulfilling his dying prayer for God to open the eyes of the King of England. One can think of today's missionaries laboring to bring the Bible to people in their heart languages. For the Orthodox, we have the example of missionary heroes like the saintly brothers Cyril and Methodius who labored among the Slavs.[[26]](#footnote-26) There is no point in translating the Bible into the common tongue unless it is the conviction of the translators that Scripture is understandable to those reading it.[[27]](#footnote-27)

I know of Orthodox parishes that engage in regular Bible studies with their members. Conversing with friends and relatives who have participated in these priest-led studies, I found they were individuals actively engaged in their faith.[[28]](#footnote-28) Would their numbers increase! So since we have examples of Orthodox Bible studies, let us agree among ourselves that the Bible can and should be read by the every believer.[[29]](#footnote-29)

We believe, with the Reformers, in the authority of the Bible because it testifies to the Living Christ who is revealed in the New Testament and also in the Old Testament which foretold His coming. Evangelicals take this on the authority of our Lord, who speaking of the Old Testament said "These are the very Scriptures that testify about me."[[30]](#footnote-30)

The Bible is authoritative because in the Bible we find the living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. The theological argument defending this position includes the testimony of the writers of Scripture to its inherent authority as the word from God to humankind.[[31]](#footnote-31) Believers who could not articulate the theological nuances as to why the Bible is our authority nevertheless, with the illumination of the Holy Spirit, find forgiveness and freedom from sin. They also discover ways to express their gratitude to God the Father through worship and holy living.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Tradition and tradition

If the Bible is as clear as I have just claimed, why then are there so many varieties of Evangelicals? The plurality of denominations and types of churches who agree to statements of basic Evangelical belief probably seems astounding to non-Evangelicals.[[33]](#footnote-33) At least one Orthodox critic blames our Bible reading without the guidance of the Church.[[34]](#footnote-34)

The reason for our diversity lies in the concept of tradition among Evangelicals. There is an established reading of the text which provides the framework of God's provision of salvation through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the common witness of the Church for nearly two centuries. When we come to discuss justification, we will see that there are differences between the Western Churches (Catholic and Protestant) and the Eastern Churches. The disagreement is over how to understand justification. The fact of God's provision for humankind's salvation is not in dispute. We are standing in the line of interpretation that can say with the Apostle Paul, "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners..."[[35]](#footnote-35)

For lack of a better term, let us call this common agreement Tradition, spelled with a capital "T." This is to what John Wycliffe, John Hus and other pre-Reformation reformers appealed. It is what the 16th century Reformers were calling the Roman Catholic Church back to. This Tradition is what all those who desire a pure church, true to its Biblical roots and Patristic theological insights, seek to return.[[36]](#footnote-36) It is the foundation of Evangelicalism.

What we need to note is the difference between Tradition, the universally accepted truths and traditions, local or national or, in the case of Protestants, denominational.

Before discussing the varieties of Evangelical tradition, it is fair to ask what tradition means in Eastern Orthodoxy. My guides for this examination are Orthodox theologians themselves. Father John Meyendorff has written extensively on tradition and how it becomes accepted as authoritative. In his essay "Tradition and Traditions" he tackles the thorny issues that surround the concept of tradition.[[37]](#footnote-37)

 Our manuals of theology and our catechisms all speak of "holy tradition" as being one of the essential elements of true Christian life in the Church. This is so because, during a history of almost two thousand years, the Church has preserved the integrity of the apostolic message, has condemned heretics and has defined the Orthodox faith in the face of various historical circumstances and doctrinal problems. She is thus the Body of Christ and the temple of the Spirit of Truth.[[38]](#footnote-38)

Meyendorff, while stressing the enduring truth of tradition, emphasizes the need to "use new channels of communication and a new language" to convey the eternal truth. "A distinction is, therefore, to be made between Holy Tradition, in its very essence, and various human traditions which may have served the Church in the past, which may even be very useful in the present as a cultural heritage, but which are not *in themselves* a part of Orthodoxy."[[39]](#footnote-39) The question of culture and what part culture plays in tradition is central.

As a missiologist, I understand the importance of presenting the gospel in a manner which engages the target culture. This is why translation into the vernacular of the Scripture and other liturgical and theological documents is so critical. The danger in all such transmission, however, is that elements of the missionary's culture will be introduced which are not part of the gospel. Examples of this abound. We see Protestant converts singing in their own language the hymn tunes of the missionary's homeland. The words are theirs but the music is foreign to their tonal system.[[40]](#footnote-40) Missionaries bring not only the gospel but, quite properly, a way of worship. There needs to be worship before a local church can be established. To introduce forms and liturgies is not wrong. But from both the Evangelical and the Orthodox perspectives, the goal is the establishment of a "native" church where the gospel is truly incarnated in the local culture.

The gospel transcends culture even as it is always presented in a particular culture as the way of life. To cite Meyendorff again:

 ...the one Apostolic Truth can and even must normally be expressed in various ways. Tradition is a *living* reality, which cannot be petrified into the forms of a particular culture since all human forms, or cultures, are by nature mortal. To disengage Holy Tradition from human traditions which tend to monopolize it is the necessary condition of its preservation.... The old traditions of Eastern Christianity can be fruitful for our generation only inasmuch as they express the *living* Tradition of the Church itself. But life always implies change and growth.[[41]](#footnote-41)

What he is pleading for here is a recognition of Tradition (with a capital "T") which is universal and binding apart from tradition (with a small "t") that is local and useful, indeed appropriate in some settings but not binding on the whole church. Meyendorff gives several examples of adaptation, some of which has occurred and some which must still occur. Speaking of the American situation in the sixties he writes:

 In the United States the "americanization" of Orthodoxy is already a fact evident to anyone who is able to compare American church life with that of the old countries. Even those Orthodox Americans who still have some knowledge of the language of their ancestors think and act as Americans, as they were taught in American schools. They are an organic part of American society. Some people, however, seem to think that this is irreconcilable with Orthodoxy. In fact, they may be right if one admits that Orthodoxy is only an "Eastern" religion, limited both geographically and culturally, a frozen conservative body of customs and beliefs, a part of a dead past. But since Orthodoxy is a *living* Tradition,  *the* Catholic Tradition of the Church of Christ, their rejection of "americanization" as such is, in fact, a pure heresy, a rejection of the Church's catholicity.[[42]](#footnote-42)

Meyendorff goes on to state that such an adaptation is necessary because it presupposes that the Church is a living organism. He is trying to correct a static concept of the Church which makes it a museum piece. Without the recognition of the true nature of the Church as living, Meyendorff believes the adaptation (to American culture) will occur but without the theological and spiritual rediscovery of the Church's being, "Orthodoxy will be lost."[[43]](#footnote-43)

In Meyendorff's view, Orthodoxy is more than the various local traditions. Kallistos Ware shares that view and introduces a helpful way of looking at acceptable theological divergence within the one Tradition as he discusses union with other Christians.

 Orthodox, then, ask of other Christians that they accept Tradition *as a whole*; but it must be remembered that there is a difference between Tradition and traditions. Many beliefs held by Orthodox are not a part of the one Tradition, but are simply theologoumena, theological opinions; and there can be no question of imposing mere matters of opinion on other Christians. Men can possess full unity in the faith, and yet hold divergent theological opinions in certain fields.[[44]](#footnote-44)

In the quote above, Ware refers the reader in a footnote to a passage earlier in his book. That passage is worth citing in our discussion.

 Not everything received from the past is of equal value, nor is everything received from the past necessarily true. As one of the bishops remarked at the Council of Carthage in 257: 'The Lord said, I am truth. He did not say, I am custom.' There is a difference between 'Tradition' and 'traditions': many traditions which the past has handed down are human and accidental--pious opinions (or worse), but not a true part of the one Tradition, the essential Christian message.[[45]](#footnote-45)

Moving on from Meyendorff's and Ware, we can perhaps see the question of tradition in Evangelicalism in a different light. There is no denying that the various branches of Evangelicalism have powerful traditions that define their life and practice. Frankly, in the breadth of Evangelicalism there are groups that hold opposing views on some issues. It may be useful to think of Evangelicalism as a circle, rather than a point.[[46]](#footnote-46) As long as you are in the circle, you are part of the evangelical fellowship even though there is disagreement on some issues. Calvinists and Wesleyans disagree on perseverance of the saints. Others hold differing views on election to salvation and the irresistibility of receiving God's grace. Eschatology is another debated point within the circle. Some denominations have strong statements on Eschatology, usually holding to premillennialism with most of those also holding to a pre-tribulation rapture of the Church.[[47]](#footnote-47) When the doctrinal statement of one particular denomination was being revised a few years ago, there were voices which wanted to remove the pre-tribulation phrase along with some who wanting to eliminate the reference to premillennialism.[[48]](#footnote-48) When it came to a vote, the majority voted not to change the statement.

In this debate of how to understand the end times narratives, the denomination's traditional interpretation of the passages functioned as a controlling hermeneutic. This particular eschatological view was forged when end time matters were keenly discussed and formed a part of the prescribed confession of faith because they were debated points. It was also held in opposition to a liberal progressive understanding of human history where everything was getting better and better. This led to a rise of postmillennialism where conditions on earth improve until the Church ushers in Christ's return.

We need to pause here to remember that all doctrine is forged in controversy. Evangelicals agree that the great ecumenical creeds arose because of the need to combat error which, if followed, would have led the church astray. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the councils affirmed what we now confess in the Nicene Creed. Doctrine arises in large part in response to heresy. So it is with our traditions which arose out of particular historical situations.

We can perhaps understand the position of Evangelical tradition if we consider an analogy. We have all been in homes where an artifact that belonged to an ancestor is proudly displayed.[[49]](#footnote-49) Just as a person might consider such an object to be of great value, so we in our particular traditions hold dear to artifacts passed down by our forbearers in the faith. Some of these were forged in the heat of battle against heresy. The meaning attached to some of these traditions perhaps exceeds the actual value of the practice in our Christian faith. The historical circumstances surrounding the practice often determines how strongly a position is held. Minor points, forged in the flame of persecution, become major doctrines which cannot be surrendered. It is good and proper to remember our martyrs and the testimonies they bore. But as in patristic times, not all martyrdom was necessary or sanctioned by the Church.[[50]](#footnote-50)

Perhaps among Evangelicals the most strongly held traditions involve our worship styles. Music in particular has, by its nature, a strong hold.[[51]](#footnote-51) We remember the songs of the past that held a special meaning for us. For Protestants in general, the saying is true that heresy is often first sung in church before it is preached from the pulpit. Theologically suspect hymns, and increasingly in Evangelical circles, praise songs exert a powerful force.

So we have denominational traditions and heroes, things and people that should be honored and cherished but not held above the essentials. The problem, however, is when our distinctives become more important than our common faith. This is in part because we are defined by our distinctives. We are Lutherans, Calvinists, Baptists, Mennonites, Anglicans first. Our labels are sometimes what we hold dearest. On some level this is understandable. For those in clerical ministry, continued employment depends upon adhering to and being excited about those distinctives.[[52]](#footnote-52) Schools of interpretation are built up to defend our traditions against all comers.[[53]](#footnote-53)

The perspicuity (clarity) of Scripture

What then becomes of the notion of the perspicuity of Scripture if honest and earnest interpreters differ? As we use the term, perspicuity relates to the main point, in the case of eschatology that the Lord Jesus is coming back. The various passages used to map out the more minute details can be seen as contradictory. But the confusion is not as great as the clarity. The clarity is far greater and covers more doctrine than do the debated specifics. Reading the Bible points to Christ and His work of redemption. Do we understand all the details or references? I don't believe we do. In some case the original recipients had knowledge of the context that we cannot reconstruct. For example, the Thessalonians apparently knew more than we do about the man of lawlessness. We can only attempt to discover what is holding him back, but Paul tells his readers "you know what is holding him back" (2 Thessalonians 2: 6).

It is not a problem that we do not know all the mysteries of the Bible because what is clear and plain has been made known to us. Are some of these references vague so that it can be the glory of scholars to seek them out?[[54]](#footnote-54) It is true that some of the arcane and difficult passages have given rise to sects who claim a special knowledge (*gnosis*) which they share with their initiates. But the mainstream of Christian history has affirmed the central truths of our faith.

It is the challenged or debated points that need definition, often more definition than we find in the Bible. All our denominational traditions arise from taking one or more passages of Scripture and ignoring other passages. Or if we don't ignore them, we interpret them in the light of what believe are the clear passages on certain issues. We sometimes go beyond God in nailing down with apparent precision points of doctrine that God, in His wisdom, left without the precision we think we require.

Some of the battles for what we think are truths, but in fact are disputed points, are at times an embarrassment to Evangelicalism. While we are right in opposing those who do not hold to the essentials of the faith, we need more charity within those who hold the essentials of the faith.[[55]](#footnote-55) That is why groups like the Lausanne Movement exist, namely, to unite all Evangelicals around the essentials.

Is it possible, that God in His great and unfathomable wisdom wanted to allow for a diversity around the essential truth? As Calvin said, the finite cannot comprehend the infinite. We confess that we cannot comprehend the infinite wisdom of God.

A God so creative as to form creatures whose form and function mystify us may also want His worship to encompass more than one particular culture.[[56]](#footnote-56) One of my colleagues is fond of speaking of the gifts each people group brings to the worship of God. He likes quoting Rev. 7: 9-10 where a great multitude that could not be counted from "every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues" praising the Lamb. A moment's thought causes us to realize that each group would be speaking its own language. So as we cannot fully comprehend the mind of our God, why should we think our way of worship is the only acceptable form to such a God?

Our diversity, instead of a barrier, becomes a testimony to who God is and what He has done through our Lord Jesus Christ for the whole world.

1. Ernest Benz, *The Eastern Orthodox Church, Its Thought and Life,*translated from the German by Richard and Clara Winston, (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1963), p.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. One of my powerful childhood memories is going from room to room at night with my aunt as she carried an incense censor to each room's icon shelf. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. One such method, advocated by the organization, Scripture Union, is a four step plan: 1. pray (asking the Holy Spirit for guidance) 2. read (the Bible passage) 3. think (is there a promise to be claimed, a warning to be heeded, a command to be obeyed, an example to follow) and 4. pray (thanking God for His illumination and asking His help in following in His revealed way). There are many other methods used by Evangelicals, but common themes are prayer for illumination to interpret and apply the text. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Often cited as the defining marks of the Evangelical movement are those pointed out by David Bebbington: "Conversionism, Activism, Biblicism, Crucicentrism." David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989). pp. 5-17. Useful as these marks are, many have pointed out that they are not unique to Evangelicals. My good friend, Dr. Bradley Nassif, in his "The Evangelical Theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church" in James Stamoolis, ed. *Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004) shows how properly understood these distinctives apply to the Orthodox Church. For an important study on how the Bible shaped the Western world, see Vishal Mangalwadi, *The Book That Made Your World: How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilization,* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011). Mangalwadi demonstrates how every part of Western civilization has been positively impacted by the Bible. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Demetrios Constantelos, "The Holy Scriptures in Greek Orthodox Worship: A Comparative and Statistical Study," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review,*  12 (1966), p. 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Georges Barrios, *Scripture Readings in Orthodox Worship,*  (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977). Barrios updated his study "Scripture Readings for Mid-Pentecost and Pentecost," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly,*  21 (1977): 148-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Luther nailed them to the door of the Castle Church of Wittenberg, the place where notices were posted. Reading the theses today, they seem rather tame as they were points for debate. But what made them inflammatory was that Luther challenged the authority of the papacy. For a convenient listing see: <http://www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. That medieval mindset is still with us as some Christians feel they must do something more to solidify their right standing with God. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The souls of the departed were held in purgatory until their time of purification had been accomplished. This period of torment could be shortened by the actions of the living who could purchase their early release. "When the coin in coffer rings, the soul from Purgatory wings." Tetzel, the seller of indulgences whom Luther opposed, used this jingle to extort money from those concerned about the well-being of their departed loved ones. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The three slogans that expressed the theological emphases of the Reformation are *Sola Scriptura (*by Scripturealone), *Sola Fide,* (*o*nly by faith), *Sola Gratia* (only by grace). Luther was combating the doctrine of works as a necessary component of salvation, making only faith and only grace refer to the mechanism of salvation. One of Luther's discoveries was that the believer is "at one and the same time a righteous person and a sinner (*simul iustus et peccator)."* Alister McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution- A History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First,*  (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), p.43 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. "Luther made this delightful discovery himself, but he freely acknowledged that he also found it proclaimed in Augustine, especially in one of his chief writings against the Pelagians, *On the Spirit and the Letter* (this is a work much referred to in the 1515-16 lectures on Romans)." Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History*  (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), p.120. He also disagreed with Augustine. "While Luther admired Augustine for his emphasis on the unconditional love of God in justification, he suggested that Augustine had become muddled in relation to the location of the gift of righteousness. Augustine located this gift within humanity, as a transforming reality; Luther argued it is located outside us, being "reckoned" or "imputed" to humanity, not imparted." McGrath, *op.cit.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. As a side note, it is interesting that John Calvin does not comment on some statements of the Council of Trent, apparently accepting them as true. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. A prior question is what books should be included. Evangelicals see two factors at work. The first is the self-attestation of Scripture, i.e. Scripture has the imprimatur of the Holy Spirit. The Bible speaks to humans in a different way from other literature. There are many books in my library and some I struggle to understand. When I turn to the Bible, however, I find that this book understands me and speaks to my condition. The second factor is the testimony of the early church with regard to what should be included and the rejection of other books. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. For a useful introduction to the topic see, D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds. *Scripture and Truth,* (Leicester: IVP, 1983). One of the chapters especially pertinent to our topic is by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "The Church Fathers and Holy Scripture," pp. 199-220. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This is, at best, a marginal improvement in understanding as the basic meaning of Scripture was clear to believers from the earliest days of the Church. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The term was coined by F. Andre Fernandez in 1927, modern popular usage usually credited to the Roman Catholic New Testament scholar, Raymond E. Brown who defines *sensus plenior* as " That additional, deeper meaning, intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author, which is seen to exist in the words of a biblical text (or group of texts, or even a whole book) when they are studied in the light of further revelation or development in the understanding of revelation." (*The* *Sensus Plenior* *of Sacred Scripture* (Baltimore: St. Mary's University, 1955), p. 92.) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Rabbinic exegesis or commentary on the text would be an example of finding another meaning in the text other than the plain meaning --— *remez* ("hint"), *drash* ("search"), and/or *sod* ("secret") — whereby 'deeper meaning' is drawn out or derived from the text. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. I have ignored for our purposes comments on the human/divine authorship of the Biblical material. In some settings this would be necessary to establish the grounds for discussion, but in our present context we will take as a point of agreement that we all believe the human authors of the Biblical books were inspired by the Holy Spirit and spoke as directed by the Lord to communicate the truths necessary for our salvation and for holy living. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. I Peter 1: 10-12 **10**Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, **11**trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. **12**It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Peter may be referencing passages such as the Suffering Servant Songs in Isaiah. (42:1-9, 49:1-13, 50:4-11, 52:13-53:13) Isaiah 42:1-2 is quoted in part in Mt:12:18-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Cf. Douglas Moo, "The Problem of *Sensus Plenior"* in D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds. *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. I am not suggesting that there are magic books of spells, but that we cannot treat the Bible as if it were such a book. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Having led many Bible Studies with self-admitted non-Christians, I can attest that they are able to understand the meaning of the text without being willing to yield to the Lord the text points to. Conversion is the work of the Spirit , not the result of human effort. However, while the Holy Spirit is the real evangelist, we are commanded to be witnesses to the One who is the way, the truth and the life. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Wycliffe worked not from the original languages but the Vulgate. His completed translation into [vernacular](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vernacular) [English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_language) was done by 1382. The lack of the printing press meant that copies had to circulate by hand copying. The number of extant manuscripts indicates a wide distribution of his translation. For more on Wycliffe's work, see G.H. Parker, *The Morning Star: Wycliffe and the Dawn of the Reformation,* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1965). John Hus was influenced by Wycliffe. The [Council of Constance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_of_Constance) which declared Wycliffe a heretic on 4 May 1415, was the same council that condemned Hus and ordered him burned at the stake. Wycliffe's corpse was not exhumed and burned and the ashes scattered until 1428. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. A thorough life of Tyndale is David Daniell, *William Tyndale, a Biography,*  (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. When my family could not drive to our Greek Orthodox parish twenty miles away, I attended Sts. Cyril and Methodius Russian Orthodox Church in my home town. The icon of the Sts. Cyril and Methodius that hung in my boyhood bedroom now hangs in my office. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Obviously for illiterates, hearing the word in their own tongue also has power. While attaining literacy is still the goal, some mission organizations are using oral transmission, including modern electronic means, to communicate the gospel. An excellent website, used around the world, is www.faithcomesbyhearing.org which provides for free downloadable audio Bibles. Currently, **Faith Comes By Hearing has Bible recordings in 737 languages spoken by over 5.7 billion people in more than 189 different countries. See also what is being done with pictorial Scripture and avatars for the deaf in various global sign languages at www.jaars.org.**  [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. One of my cousins participated in such a study at her church. It is not an exaggeration to say that this experience changed her life. The Bible studies which led her into a deeper knowledge of the Orthodox faith were truly transforming. While a cradle Orthodox, she felt that only when she was in her 40s did she really understand and in her words "come to faith." She remained a faithful and devout Greek Orthodox all her mortal life. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. I have a very beautiful Orthodox Study Bible with notes and helps. It is designed for Bible Study by Orthodox believers. *The Orthodox Study Bible,* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008) The NT text is the New King James Version and the OT is a translation from the Septuagint prepared by St. Athanasius Academy. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Jesus was speaking to the Jewish leaders who had sent a delegation to John the Baptist and now were questioning Jesus. While the Jews read the Scriptures, they could not see Christ in the Scriptures. (John 5: 33-40) [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. In addition to the prophetic utterances, "Hear the word of the LORD," "Thus says the LORD" we have passages that speak of the value of Scriptures such as 2 Timothy 3:16 or 2 Peter 3:16 where Peter calls the writings of Paul Scripture. Instructive is the story of the disdain with which King Jehoiakim treated the Scripture, burning the prophecy given to Jeremiah. The prophecy was considered to be the word of God. Jeremiah 36: 11-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Here we begin to impinge on our second topic, that of Justification and Sanctification. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. We leave off the even greater number of denominations and churches which cannot assent to Evangelical confession statements. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Frankie Schaffer, a convert to Orthodoxy and the son of the Evangelical apologist Francis Schaffer blames the reading of the Bible privately, but he exaggerates when he speaks of the "25,000 different Protestant denominations." Audio tape of a talk by Schaffer. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. I Timothy 1:15. If we really understand the gospel, we will complete the verse, agreeing with Paul "among whom I am foremost *of all.*" NASV Evangelical and Orthodox theology both stress the need for the Incarnation, Evangelicals even there was one sinner, Orthodox even if none had sinned to complete the perfection of humankind. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. An example is Charles Hodge, (1797 –1878) the great Princeton Seminary Theologian, who proudly claimed that the seminary never had an original thought but was merely stating the truth of God once delivered. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. John Meyendorff, "Tradition and Traditions" in *Orthodoxy and Catholicity****,*** (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966), pp. 91- 106. This chapter is so central to our discussion I considered reproducing it completely as an appendix. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. *Ibid.* p. 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. *Ibid.* p. 92. The emphasis on  *in themselves* is in the original text. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. This is being corrected as ethnomusicologists assist converts in developing their own hymnology. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. *Ibid.* pp. 101-103 *passim.*  The emphases are in the original. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. *Ibid.* p. 103 The emphases are in the original. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. *Ibid.*  p. 104. It is not the purpose of this essay to discuss canonical territory, but Father John's essay in the same volume on "One Bishop in One City" (pp.107-118) deals with the jurisdictional problems of various ethnic Orthodox churches existing the United States. It is useful to remember that this essay was penned before the formation of the Orthodox Church in America from the former Russian Orthodox Church. It is this writer's view that the canonical problems of the various Orthodox Churches in America both pose a problem for Tradition and create space for dialogue with non-Orthodox Christians. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church,*(Baltimore: Penguin, 1963), p. 319. A couple of notes are needed. First the italics are in Ware's text. Second this quote comes from the first edition of Ware's book and is not found in exactly the same way in later editions. A similar passage is found in the most recent editions " ...there is a vital distinction between Tradition and traditions between essential faith and theological opinions. We seek unity in faith, not in opinions and customs." *The Orthodox Church,* 1977, p.310. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. *Ibid.*  p. 205 (1963 ed.), p. 197 (1977 ed.) The quotation comes from *The Opinions of the Bishops on the Baptizing of Heretics,* 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Francis Schaffer (whose son is a convert to Orthodoxy) held this position. Inside the circle were all who believed in the final authority of Scripture. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. We could further confuse the issue by referring to the two types of premillennialism, historic premillennialism and dispensational premilliennialism. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Christ’s Return: We believe in the personal, bodily and premillennial return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission. (From the doctrinal statement of the Evangelical Free Church of America.)

From a missiological standpoint, the necessity for unbelievers to hear and respond to the gospel in light of the imminent return of Christ as the judge of all humankind has been a motivating factor in mission lest those who haven't heard be condemned to a Christ-less eternity. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. The artifact itself may be common and of little worth. What makes it precious is its association with the ancestor. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Origen's mother hid his clothes so he could not go out and be martyred. Unfortunately she didn't manage to keep him from emasculating himself to fulfill his interpretation of Matthew 19:12. In spite of it being an ancient practice, it did not make its way into Tradition. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. One is reminded of the Catholic hymn, sung with great gusto by Protestants who are ignorant of its origin, *Faith* *of Fathers*. " Faith of our fathers, living still, In spite of dungeon, fire, and sword; Oh, how our hearts beat high with joy Whene’er we hear that glorious Word!" The author, Frederick Faber, was a convert from Anglicanism to the Roman Catholic Church and penned his lines to protest the persecution of Catholics in England. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. The examples are too numerous to mention, but many Evangelical institutions have strong confession statements to which employees must adhere. Fundamentalist organizations, in my opinion, are even stricter. However, this type of proscribed allegiance is not limited to religious organizations. Some industries demand as great a conformity to the "party line" as do religious groups. Secular academic institutions do not escape this censure for in spite of the slogan of "academic freedom," there are disciplines where departure from the "accepted truths" of the discipline spell the ruin of an academic career. Try to oppose the theory of evolution in a secular university science department and you will soon learn there is no academic freedom to do that. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. One need only think of how churches in the Southern United States defended slavery as Biblical before the Civil War or how the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa found Biblical justification for Apartheid. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Proverbs 25:2 "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings to search out a matter." [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Our Lord bids us to love both our friends and our enemies. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. The variety of animal life is to me astounding. There are creatures, like the nudibranch, [soft-bodied](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soft-bodied_organisms), [marine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marine_%28ocean%29) [gastropod](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gastropod) [mollusks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mollusk) which are noted for their often extraordinary colors and striking forms. There are more than 3,000 described species of nudibranchs, a large number of which live in depths of the ocean where no human will ever see them apart from using special diving apparatus. What a creative God we serve! [↑](#footnote-ref-56)