

Lausanne Orthodox Initiative Alaskan Consultation

“Removing Barriers: How Evangelicals Understand the Church and Mission in the World”

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My Story

I am a cradle Orthodox baptized in the Greek Orthodox Church. My mother and her three brothers ran a restaurant and candy store that had been started by my great uncle. Had my father not been killed in a tragic accident when I was four months old I would have been brought up in a suburb of Pittsburgh and attended either “The Presentation of Christ Greek Orthodox Church” in East Pittsburgh (our home parish) or St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Oakland. I would have also grown up in the wholesale grocery business instead of the restaurant-candy business.

Because our store was open on Sundays, especially during candy season (September through May), and our parish was 20 miles away, I went to St. Cyril and Methodius Russian Orthodox Church in Jeannette for Sunday School and church.¹ My mother was working so I walked there on my own. I was an altar boy and for a very short time sang in the choir. For as long as I can remember I was interested in spiritual matters. I tried reading the Bible but only being familiar with reading books from the beginning got bogged down time and time again in the Old Testament. I always believed in God though I could not explain what our Orthodox faith was about. In short I was devout but uneducated. I don’t blame the good people at St. Cyril and Methodius for my ignorance as they tried to teach me the basics in Sunday School. I learned the rituals. How to cross myself, the postures of prayer and reverence for the Eucharist.

But I was only a theist. I didn’t really understand the Christian faith. It wasn’t until I got to university and met some evangelical Christians that I heard a presentation of the Christian story that I could understand and eventually respond to. My personal pilgrimage had led me to question the purpose of life. As I was pondering this, my fellow students shared with me how they found purpose and meaning in a relationship with God through Christ. On the human level, the person who influenced me most was an Afro-Caribbean student from what was then British Guiana. Early in my first year I knelt by bed and yielded my life to Christ’s control. Later I discovered that my evangelical friends had been praying for me.

Trying to make sense of how my “conversion” fit in with Greek Orthodoxy, I took two buses across town to the Greek Orthodox Church to speak with the priest. He gave me a copy of the same Sunday School manual I had studied at the Russian Church. But he couldn’t answer my spiritual questions.

¹ Perhaps it was foreshadowing of my future interest in Orthodox missions that the church was dedicated to the two great missionary brothers, though I was only vaguely aware of the significance of these missionaries. The icon of Sts. Cyril and Methodius hung in my bedroom as I was growing up and now adorns the wall of my study. My appreciation for the work of these missionaries has obviously grown since my childhood.

The Lehigh Christian Fellowship, as our chapter of Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship was called, was a small but committed band of brothers. Band of brothers is an accurate term as Lehigh University during my student years was a male only undergraduate college. Our faculty advisors helped but most of the witnessing to our fellow students was one on one, the same way I had been reached. I grew spiritually through our programs on campus and the IVCF camps. Between my freshman and sophomore years, our IVCF staff worker invited me to be part of a team of college students who conducted an evangelistic program to children on the New Jersey shore. It was serving on this team that I met Evelyn, a nursing student from Johns Hopkins School of Nursing. By God's design, we were both on the team the next summer and started dating after the second summer of ministry. We married when I graduated with my B.S. in Industrial Engineering.

I attended the IVCF Urbana Missionary Convention over Christmas break my sophomore year and signed a missionary decision card indicating that I would be willing, if called by God, to be a missionary. One of the students at Lehigh who mentored me was a civil engineering major. Upon graduation he went to medical school to prepare to be a medical missionary. Having his example, I thought that if I were serious about serving God, I needed to become a medical missionary as well. While remaining an engineering student, I changed majors to allow me to take more pre-med courses. At the same Urbana convention, one of my fellow students who was a year ahead of me also received God's call. He was a chemical engineer but upon graduation went to seminary, a fact that plays into my story.

By my senior year, two things were clear. I was not called to be a medical doctor and I was called to go to seminary for a year to solidify my Christian understanding. The former chemical engineer had matriculated at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (TEDS). He invited any of us at Lehigh to come and visit the seminary. I took him up on his offer and God confirmed the decision to go to TEDS.

What you need to understand at this point is that I was still technically an Orthodox Christian. That is my membership was in our home parish and I had not joined any Protestant church even though I mostly attended evangelical churches during my student years. Try to explain that to an admissions officer who asks for a pastoral recommendation as part of the application process. Somehow I was accepted without a pastoral letter. All through my four years of seminary I was still nominally Orthodox. It wasn't until we were applying to a mission that required their missionaries to be members of an evangelical church that I formally joined the Baptist Church Evelyn grew up in.

After completing my M.Div., I spent a fourth year at TEDS doing a Th.M. Initially part of my motivation for going to seminary was to learn the difference between Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism. My thesis, "Scripture and Tradition as Sources of Authority in the Eastern Orthodox Church," was an attempt to understand the Orthodox Church on its own terms. Since I seemed destined for an academic career my seminary dean, Dr. Kenneth Kantzer, suggested that I take up a two year teaching position at a Bible College in South Africa. He believed the experience would make me a better instructor when I completed a doctorate. What neither he nor I could know is that I would earn a doctorate at an Afrikaans speaking university in South

Africa. How I met my doctoral professor is a fascinating story². Prof. W. J. van der Merwe approved my dissertation on the missionary work of the Orthodox Church. It has been published as *Eastern Orthodox Mission Theology Today* and perhaps some of you have seen it.

I have often been asked since I know so much about the Orthodox Church why I remain an evangelical. It is true that I know more and believe more Orthodox doctrine than when I was officially an Orthodox. It is also true, however, that by God's grace I am a bridge person between the two traditions. I wrote the dissertation with two purposes in mind. One was to remind the Orthodox of their rich history of missionary outreach and to join the voices of the Orthodox, like Archbishop Anastasios, who call for renewal of evangelistic zeal. The other was to enlighten my fellow western Christians, both Protestant and Roman Catholic about the scope of Orthodox missionary work.³ By being a voice, as it were, from inside both traditions I can speak to both evangelicals and Orthodox.⁴ Another part of the answer is that while I am comfortable in both traditions, I am more comfortable in evangelicalism.⁵ My personal theology is a mixture of the two traditions and evangelicalism allows me the freedom to confess my faith in this manner.⁶

Who are the Evangelicals

Defining the evangelical movement is not an easy task. There is of course David Bebbington's fourfold definition of Crucicentrism, Biblicism, Conversionism and Activism. But as Bradley Nassif has demonstrated, these characteristics are also found in the Orthodox Church.⁷ Several well known evangelical institutions discovered that Orthodox Christians can honestly sign the doctrinal statements required of all faculty and staff. These evangelical institutions felt the pressure to exclude all but those they defined as evangelical. They mostly have done this by stressing the Reformation roots of evangelicalism.⁸

² We were both speaking at a student conference in Lesotho sponsored by the Students Christian Association. One evening Prof. Van der Merwe asked what my future plans were. When I mentioned that I was thinking of further graduate study he invited to study with him.

³ Perhaps one sign I was successful is that I revised the article on Orthodox Missions in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*. I also wrote "Innokentii Veniaminov," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, revised ed. Vol. 7, Macmillan Publishing Company

⁴ My good friend Brad Nassif remained in the Orthodox Church after first studying at an evangelical seminary. We have a shared passion for promoting understanding between the two traditions. See his helpful *The Evangelical Theology of the Orthodox Church*, (St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2021) Also his lectures on the same subject given at the Eagle River Institute: <https://eagleriverinstitute.org/series/evangelical-theology-orthodox-church#lecture>

⁵ Some may argue that "comfort" is not a valid criteria, truth is the criteria. My response is that Jesus said "I am the way and the truth and the life." (John 14:6) I serve one Lord as I believe He has led me. This is my journey and my path in obedience to Christ. We each must follow the Lord as we are led. (John 21:22)

⁶ By this I mean that while confessing the common faith as given in the Nicene Creed, I am able to express *theologoumena* as a mixture of both traditions. One example would be my understanding of Adam and Eve's state of innocence which tends to be more in line with the Orthodox view than the majority of Evangelical theologians.

⁷ Nassif, *op.cit.* Also see James Stamoolis, ed. *Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism*, (Zondervan 2004). Nassif's essay makes the point that these characteristics are also found in Eastern Orthodoxy.

⁸ For example, Wheaton College added a preface to its statement of faith, explicitly identifying the college with the Reformation and the evangelical movement. "The doctrinal statement of Wheaton College, reaffirmed annually by its Board of Trustees, faculty, and staff, provides a summary of biblical doctrine that is consonant with evangelical

Historically there are four definitions of the term evangelical. The most common use of Evangelical is to describe a movement that arose in the early 20th century in opposition to the theological liberalism. Professors and pastors authored a series of booklets published under the title of “The Fundamentals.”⁹ Through the generosity of two Christian laymen, these booklets were widely distributed.¹⁰ Those holding to these fundamentals, which were nothing more than the historic Christian faith as expressed in the creeds, became known as Fundamentalists. Around the midpoint of the 20th century the movement split in Evangelical and Fundamentalist camps. Briefly the Evangelicals were interested in engaging culture whereas the Fundamentalists were separatists. But this generalization does not do justice to the nuances of either group. Outside observers often confuse and merge the two groups.

Prior to the mid 19th century the prevailing theological opinion in the United States was evangelical.¹¹ Evangelical theology arose from the great revivals that of the 18th and 19th centuries. From these revivals were born educational institutions and missionary societies, some of which exist to this day and which remain true to the gospel. This is a second definition of evangelical used to describe the religious climate prior to advent of liberal theology.

The third definition is the use of the term historically in Europe to denote the Protestant churches that arose from the Reformation of the 16th century. These groups are called “Evangelical” and as mentioned above are part of the self understanding of the evangelical movement which hark back to these Protestant roots. As a side note, Protestant does not have its root in “protest” but in the Latin “*pro-testimonium* or “for a testimony.” The Reformation of the 16th century indeed spoke against the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church, but the name comes from the Reformers wanting to give a testimony to their faith.¹²

Christianity. The statement accordingly reaffirms salient features of the historic Christian creeds, thereby identifying the College not only with the Scriptures but also with the reformers and the evangelical movement of recent years. The statement also defines the biblical perspective which informs a Wheaton education. These doctrines of the church cast light on the study of nature and man, as well as on man's culture.”

<https://www.wheaton.edu/about-wheaton/statement-of-faith-and-educational-purpose/>

⁹ *The Fundamentals* are still in print but they can also be read on line at Digital Commons @ Biola (<https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/the-fundamentals/#>) The authors were well known in their day and their names are still recognized today, e.g. B.B. Warfield, James Orr, and Robert E. Speer (for whom the Princeton Seminary Library is named) to name three of the 64 writers.

¹⁰ Lyman Stewart, the founder of Union Oil and a devout Presbyterian and his brother Milton funded the printing and distribution of 3 million volumes (250,000 sets) that went out to pastors and missionaries in English speaking countries. Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Fundamentals and <https://www.theopedia.com/the-fundamentals>.

¹¹ In spite of Maryland having Roman Catholic roots, there was in the original colonies widespread opposition to the Catholic Church with prohibitions and penalties levied against Catholics. In the 19th century there was a movement against allowing immigration from traditionally Catholic countries.

¹² At the Diet of Worms (1521) Luther was asked to recant his writings. After explaining the nature of his work, Luther issues his famous reply. “Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures and by clear reason for I do not trust in the pope or councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves, I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted. My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.” His entire speech is reproduced at <https://davidbahn-reflections.com/2017/10/31/martin-luthers-here-i-stand-speech/> *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* by Roland

Luther, Calvin and the other Reformers found in the Bible a liberating gospel that broke the yoke of the Roman Catholic Church. The 16th century Reformers were not the first in history to find in the Scripture good news of God's redemption. Luther and Calvin knew and treasured the church fathers.¹³ A hundred years before Luther, John Huss professed the same teaching and was burnt at the stake. Huss was echoing the teaching of John Wycliffe.¹⁴ These and other witnesses throughout history are the fourth use of the term evangelical. It describes all those who proclaimed the gospel. This last definition covers the reforming movements prior to the Protestant Reformation as well as the Fathers. Many of these later movements were within the established church, some were welcomed but many were not.¹⁵

For the purposes of this paper I will use the term evangelical to refer to the movement that arose in the 20th century to defend the historic Christian faith. But we must always keep in mind the other definitions. The second and the third are the historical roots of the evangelical movement. The fourth definition links the movement with the Apostolic witness. The evangelical movement has a history even if those called Evangelical are not familiar with their own antecedents.

What do Evangelicals believe?

What is the distinguishing mark of an Evangelical? The distinguishing mark is their personal relationship to Jesus. Various descriptors are employed: "Jesus lives in my heart," "I invited Him into my life," "I have a personal faith in Christ," "I have accepted Him as my Savior," "I have been born again." These are some of the expressions believers use to describe their faith in God through Christ. It is an Evangelical tenant that each believer has a connection to Jesus who died for our salvation and through Him to God the Father. This, more than any other doctrine connects the wide denominational variety of Evangelicals into a movement.¹⁶

Bainton (Penguin) is still the definitive introduction to Luther and the Reformation. Bainton realistically portrays his subject with all his genius and faults.

¹³ Cf. Anthony N. S. Lane, *John Calvin Student of Church Fathers*, (T & T Clark International, 1991) Lane, a leading Calvin scholar explores Calvin's relationships with the fathers and medieval scholars. See also Esther Chung-Kim, *Inventing Authority: The Use of the Church Fathers in Reformation Debates over the Eucharist*, (Baylor University Press, 2011). Chung-Kim shows how the reformers turned to the church fathers to align their movements with the early church. She examines not only Luther and Calvin, but also the not as well known persons such as Oecolampadius and Hesshusen. An older study, originally published in 1946, is Rupert E. Davies, *The Problem of Authority in the Continental Reformers: A Study in Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin*, (Wipf and Stock, 2009).

¹⁴ Wycliffe died 30 years before Huss but his bones were dug up 43 years after his death and burned. His crime? To dare to translate the Bible into English so common folk could read it for themselves.

¹⁵ Cf. David M. Gustafson *Gospel Witness through the Ages: A History of Evangelism*, (Eerdmans, 2022).

¹⁶ This, in my opinion, is even more central than the doctrine of the authority of Scripture. Evangelicals, especially theologians, can have different views on the "infallibility" of the Bible, but the personal experience with the living Christ unites Evangelicals. The same would hold true for the thorny issue of hermeneutics among Evangelicals. The current debates over the role of women in ministry and the issue of egalitarian versus complementarianism revolve around matters of interpretation of Scripture.

The key issue is not what church they attend but their personal connection to the resurrected Christ in whom they have placed their hope. This experience transcends denominational and theological differences; it is the Evangelical commonality. I would add that not only does it transcend different Protestant expressions of Christianity, also includes believers in Eastern Orthodoxy, Oriental Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism.¹⁷ The difference is Christianity rather than Churchianity, i.e. not just going to church but being in Christ through a personal relationship with Him.¹⁸ There are some Evangelicals and Fundamentalists who believe that only those in a Bible believing church are really truly saved.¹⁹ This confounds and adds to the gospel another requirement, i.e. particular church membership. I would call this sectarianism and such groups exhibit almost a cult like atmosphere. While they may emphasize the necessity of a personal relationship with Christ, they are what Professor van der Merwe would call a cult. His definition of a cult is any group that says Jesus plus something else. In my example it is certain church membership, often accompanied by rebaptism into their fellowship. But Dr. van der Merwe would include any “plus” that included human activity as a necessary component.²⁰

The appropriation of salvation as a future hope and also a present reality is what most would call their conversion. A person may have grown up in a Christian environment but the time of "owning" the faith for oneself is linked to being "born again."²¹ The experience of spiritual awakening is the defining moment of a person's life. Testimonies revolve around when a person was born again and how that changed his or her life. In some circles, a person might to be challenged by the question "Have you been born again?"²² Ministers preach for conversion, seeking to have their hearers decide to place their faith in Christ.

¹⁷ Fr. Alexander Veronis, longtime priest of Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church in Lancaster Pennsylvania, was brought to faith through the witness of his college roommate, a missionary kid from India who Fr. Alexander described as the holiest person he has ever known. Fr. Alexander was active in Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship during his college years. He was called to seminary and nearly attended a Protestant seminary but was lead by God to visit Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Seminary. There the Holy Spirit spoke to him about becoming a Greek priest. I have met others like him in the aforementioned traditions whose primary relationship is with Christ as their Savior and Lord.

¹⁸ “*Churchianity* is a term with multiple definitions. Officially (according to Merriam-Webster), churchianity is ‘an excessive or narrowly sectarian attachment to the practices and interests of a particular church.’ The term *churchianity*, in popular usage, takes on a broader meaning, as it is often applied to a redefinition of the gospel. In churchianity, God’s redemption story has been repackaged into a self-help program that has some Christian flavor but is stripped of salvation’s true meaning.” <https://www.gotquestions.org/churchianity.html>

¹⁹ I know a lovely and committed Fundamentalist couple who told me of their Christian friend who was certainly “born again” and exhibited all the characteristics of, in their terms, a real Christian. Their only problem was that their friend remained a Greek Orthodox. This didn’t fit their pattern of understanding. While they couldn’t deny her evident salvation and enjoyed fellowship with her, her church membership bothered them. They suffered from churchianity.

²⁰ Professor van der Merwe, a Dutch Reformed Christian, was adamant that it was faith in Christ alone was all that was required.

²¹ The terminology comes from John 3:3 in the discourse with Nicodemus.

²² I have experienced this in African cultures where the questioner dispenses with small talk and directly asks for evidence of a conversion experience.

Unpacking this further, the best summation is given by the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 15:1-4. The salvation message is simply "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." There are many methods of presenting this truth which have been developed for evangelism.²³ The common elements are 1) an acknowledgement of our sin which brought death and separation from God, 2) our need for Jesus, God in the flesh, to repair that break by His death and resurrection, and 3) our acceptance of His sacrifice in our place. While there is a logical progression in these elements, some experience the steps in a different order.²⁴ But eventually all the components are present. The confession is not just human sinfulness in general, but acceptance of personal responsibility for my sin. Conversion includes the realization that I cannot meet God's standard for holiness. Only Christ could and has met the standard God requires. It encompasses the understanding that Christ's death on my behalf has mercifully opened the way to the Father and I only need to accept His death as mine. In gratitude and love I walk in a new life in Him. "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism unto death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in the newness of life." (Romans 6:4)

This is what Evangelicals mean by a conversion experience, i.e., becoming a Christian. It is turning away from our sin and turning to God through faith in the completed work of Christ.²⁵ Theologically, this is the doctrine of justification. "... who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification. Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 4:25-5:1)

One criticism raised against the evangelical view is that it individualistic and as such a product of the Enlightenment where the individual becomes the measure of all things.²⁶ It is true that the Enlightenment focused on the person. It is, however, also true that an honest reading of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation will reveal that while the concept of community is present, the focus is on "The person who sins will die." (Ezekiel 18:20) While the community is important

²³ "The Four Spiritual Laws" by Campus Crusade for Christ consists of four simple statements backed by Scripture texts. 1. God **loves** you and offers a wonderful **plan** for your life. 2. Man is **sinful** and **separated** from God. Therefore, he cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life. 3 Jesus Christ is God's **only** provision for man's sin. Through Him you can know and experience God's love and plan for your life. 4. We must individually **receive** Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God's love and plan for our lives. Another simple evangelistic presentation is "The Romans Road", where the seeker is led through a series of passages in the Epistle to the Romans. (Romans 3:23, 6:23, 10:9 and the promises of Romans 5:18, 8:38-39)

²⁴ Some may be overwhelmed by the love of God, only to discover later the extent of their rebellion against God as they move into that love. More typically the sense of sin drives them to seek a remedy.

²⁵ Even our turning away or repentance is possible only because of God's grace and the work of the Holy Spirit. Our repentance is not a "work" prior to conversion.

²⁶ The many books on how to speak to others about a personal faith in Christ emphasize the necessity of community. E.g. Jerry Root & Stan Guthrie, *The Sacrament of Evangelism* (Moody Publishers, 2011). The authors devote a quarter of their book on integrating converts into the church. The title is interesting. Root and Guthrie explain that they are "offering a way of looking at life and the world that is open to God's presence everywhere. This approach is called *sacramental*." p. 15 (Italics in the original.)

as the people of God, yet not everyone in the community is automatically saved.²⁷ Personal holiness was required of each Israelite, a fact that the prophets hammer home as they denounced sin and proclaimed God's judgment. The prophets also held out the promise of forgiveness for a return to following the precepts of Yahweh. Therefore apostolic preaching built on the Old Testament and stands in continuity between the two Testaments.

Where then is the concept of community? Is it true that evangelicals preach a doctrine of "lone ranger" Christians? It's just you and Jesus. This is an aberration of true Biblical and hopefully evangelical doctrine. The person who has a relationship with Christ is part of "the household of God." (Eph. 2:19) The focus of the New Testament, like that of the Old Testament is on the holy community. The New Testament authors know nothing of individual Christians as all are members of the church.²⁸ But they do know of personal responsibility for personal holiness. Our Lord Himself affirms this in the letters to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation. The emphasis is on the responsibility of the churches in its members to resist the particular vice that besets each church.²⁹

Therefore the charge that evangelicals are only interested in individuals professing faith without being part of the body of Christ is not true. Vibrant local churches expect their members not only to be involved in corporate worship but to avail themselves of the opportunity for fellowship in Bible study groups as well as to volunteer to serve the church with the spiritual gifts they have received.³⁰

The experience of a dynamic relationship with Christ through faith has several consequences. In the first place, the believer experiences a peace with God that was unknown prior to the commencement of this relationship. Some who were raised in a Christian home cannot recall a time when they did not believe in God. They often experience a dedication or consecration when they received full assurance of their relationship with Christ.³¹ Most Evangelicals point to a time of yielding to Christ, what they would describe as their conversion moment. But whether over a long period of coming to faith or a decisive moment, the freedom from the guilt of sin is a

²⁷ The list of references could be multiplied but the import of the passages point to the need for the individual be right with God.

²⁸ There are over one hundred references to the church and in every instant, the writer refers to the believer's participation in the body.

²⁹ The Greek has our Lord speaking to individuals and is so in most English translations. Those translations which endeavor to be "gender neutral" use plural pronouns.

³⁰ For example the local church I attend has adult Sunday School classes, a women's Bible study, a men's group, small groups that meet in various homes. The members are encouraged to volunteer according to their giftedness as teachers, ushers, worship team, hospitality members, care ministry to name but a few.

³¹ As an elder part of my responsibility is to interview those who seek to become members of our local church. I recently heard the testimony of a young person who had made a profession of faith as child but only came to acknowledge Jesus as Lord of his life in his early 20s. He had been raised in a Christian home and had attended an Evangelical college but by his own admission had not being "yielded" to Christ.

common experience. Those who have read *Pilgrims Progress* by John Bunyan will describe it like the loosening of the burden Pilgrim was carrying when he came to the cross.³²

A second result is, for lack of a better term, the "love of the brethren." "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren." (I John 3: 14). The fellowship of Christians becomes a reality and we understand we are now part of the family of God. Our Christian family can become closer than our family of origin.³³ "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household." (Ephesians 2:19)³⁴

A third benefit, though admittedly not always appropriated by believers is that the quality of our lives is now bound up with Christ in the heavenlies. We have passed from death to life and have eternal life. (John 5:24)³⁵ This assurance of heaven is the portion of the believer, but the sense of already beginning to experience eternal life eludes some.³⁶

³² Bunyan's Pilgrim was burdened by a load carried on his back (representing his sin). "This *Legality*, therefore, is not able to set thee free from thy Burden. ... Ye cannot be justified by the Works of the Law; for by the deeds of the law no man living can be rid of his burden..... upon that place stood a *Cross*, and a little below, in the bottom, a Sepulchre. ... just as *Christian* came up with the *Cross*, his Burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do, till it came to the mouth of the Sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more." John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1977 reprinted from the edition of 1895) pp. 19, 35-36. Bunyan's work was originally published in 1678. A good visual representation of the joy and relief of Pilgrim is provided in a scene from *The Mission*. This movie is about the Jesuit missionary work among the Guaraní Indians in South America. Many of my students, when I showed this film in class, compared Pilgrim's experience at the cross with the scene where the slave trader Mendoza drags a heavy bundle containing his armor and sword up the Iguassu Falls. The Indians, in a dramatic moment, instead of killing Mendoza cut away his burden and which falls down to the river. The difference, however, is that Mendoza is dragging his burden as penance. When he returns to fighting the armor and sword are retrieved.

³³ Examples of this abound as believers share their lives in Christian fellowship. "There is a friend that sticks closer than a brother" Proverbs 18:24. The life of the Jerusalem church in the early chapters of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles illustrates this point. The communal life, unfortunately, is not always present. The church in Corinth suffered from party factions.

³⁴ Lest I be accused of only citing part of sentence, the context is that we are built on the foundation laid by Christ and His apostles, of whom the prophets testified. Ephesians 2: 19 "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit."

³⁵ "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes in Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."

³⁶ For some the assurance of eternal life eludes them as their denominational tradition does not teach the doctrine of eternal security of the believer. In these traditions, however, as long as the believers are in a state of grace and not consciously sinning, they experience this eternal life. Their church doctrine tells them that they cannot only fall from the state of grace but risk losing their salvation as well.

A fourth benefit and the one that should rank first on my list is that the believer experiences the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.³⁷ I have placed it here, however, because it leads us to a discussion of the ministry of the Spirit. The testimony of the indwelling Holy Spirit not only confirms our relationship to Christ, the Spirit teaches us about Christ and guides the believer into all truth. (John 16: 13-15)

The Christian who relies on the indwelling Spirit of God is following the example of the Lord Jesus whose actions were also done in the power of the Spirit. (Matthew 12:28) The wonder of the Incarnation is that the Lord Jesus laid aside His power and prerogatives to live within human limitations.³⁸ He became fully man and His power to work miracles was supplied by the Holy Spirit. As believers indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we can allow the Spirit to work in and through us so that the glory is not ours but God's.³⁹ Not only do we operate in the power of the Holy Spirit, but each believer is gifted by the Spirit for the common good. (I Corinthians 12:7) That these gifts are not always recognized and utilized is a weakness in the Evangelical movement. Evangelical theology, while disagreeing over whether some of the "sign" gifts are valid today, still maintains the necessity of spiritual gifts for the health of the church.⁴⁰

For these reasons, Evangelicals want to introduce their family, friends, strangers and the whole world to Jesus who made such a profound difference in their lives.⁴¹

The responses which are encountered mirror those to the Apostle Paul after his speech to the Areopagus. Some sneer, some are curious to hear more and some believe.⁴² Anyone who has shared her or his faith will over time find these same three responses.

Why do Evangelicals pray for people to make "decisions for Christ?" Whether it is in the context of a massive campaign by the evangelist Billy Graham pleading for people to receive

³⁷ "However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." Romans 8:9 (NASV) Cf. Romans 5:5, I John 3:24

³⁸ What exactly Christ laid aside in being human is subject to theological debate. (Philippians 2:5-11) However, the Bible is clear that Jesus did not use the powers that were available to Him, particularly to avoid the cross. See Matt. 26:53 where Jesus says as He is being arrested that if He asked, the Father would put at His disposal seventy two thousand angels. If two angels overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, what could 72,000 do?

³⁹ Jesus told His disciples that "he who believes in Me, the works I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to Father." John 13:12 (NASV) This discourse is in the context of the sending of the Spirit to be with the disciples. Leaving aside who (apostles, bishops, clergy, laity) will do these greater works, it is clear from the context that these works will only be done in the power of the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁰ Pentecostals and Charismatics practice the gifts of speaking in tongues and prophecy which some other Evangelicals believe belongs only to the Apostolic Age. The gift of healing, practiced widely among Charismatics, is acknowledged by most Evangelicals though not generally practiced as often as it is among Charismatics.

⁴¹ We are reminded of Bebbington's marks of Evangelicalism, the first one being "Conversionism." The other three are Activism, Biblicism, Crucicentrism. David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, (Baker Book House, 1989), pp. 5-17.

⁴² Those who sneer are not only adherents of other faiths or atheists. I can recall a conversation when some Greek Orthodox friends of mine were indignant as they discussed Evangelical Christians who had assurance of their salvation. The presumption of these Christians to know they were "saved" offended my friends.

Christ as their Savior or in a conversation between two individuals where the believer urges an unbeliever to accept Christ, the goal is the "salvation" of unbelievers.⁴³

The typical nominal Christian of any Church background thinks (if he or she thinks of this at all) that God will look at my deeds and hopefully see I have done enough good and not too much bad. To use an academic analogy, if a passing grade is such and such a percentage, I am probably short of the mark. But if God grades "on the curve," adjusting the passing percentage downward to include as many as possible in heaven, I will probably make it. The prevailing attitude seems to be that I am not perfect, but I am average, or perhaps a bit above average, in "goodness."⁴⁴ God's standard according to Evangelical theology, however, is perfection in which all humankind falls short. (Romans 3:23)

It is an Evangelical conviction that persons without Christ are lost, dead in their sins and without hope facing an eternity separated from God.⁴⁵ The assurance of heaven is a powerful motivation for witness, but it is not the only motivation. Those who minister in animistic societies where people are in fear of the spirit world have seen the liberating power of the gospel. Men, women and children formerly in bondage come to understand Jesus has power over all evil spirits.⁴⁶ Anyone who has heard the testimony of a drug addict whose life has been totally transformed by his or her conversion will understand what is meant by new life. One does not, however, need to have a dramatic past to experience the joy of being justified. For the Evangelical this experience of a personal relationship with God through the finished work of Christ is what is termed Justification where God is the justifier and we, through Christ, become the justified.

The concept of sanctification has two basic meanings in the Bible. The first we see in the Old Testament where to *sanctify* something or someone is to set it apart for God's use. The Hebrew adjective *qadosh* means "to separate" and comes from the verb meaning "to cut off" or "to separate." This does not imply an intrinsic holiness in the object or person; it simply means to consecrate or set it apart for God's use.⁴⁷ A common vessel is sanctified when it is set apart for

⁴³ Evangelicals study books on how to share their faith. One of the best examples is Paul Little, *How to Give Away Your Faith*, (Intervarsity Press, 2nd edition 1988)

⁴⁴ This paragraph is a composite based on conversations with many individuals over the years. The common theme is that while acknowledging their shortcomings, they hope their good deeds will outweigh their sin. These conversations reveal a lack of understanding of the role of Christ in paying the complete penalty for human sin.

⁴⁵ The prospect of eternal punishment of unbelievers was historically a powerful motivation for Evangelical missions. There is a current debate on whether eternal punishment is really eternal or has some time component. Cf. *The Nature of Hell: A report by the Evangelical Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth Among Evangelicals*. (Paternoster Publishing, 2000). For a discussion of the different views see William Crockett, ed. *Four Views on Hell*, (Zondervan, 1996) and Edward William Fudge and Robert A. Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical & Theological Dialogue*, (IVP Academic, 2000)

⁴⁶ An excellent book by a missionary working in an animistic culture is Robert C. Blaschke, *Quest for Power* (Guardian Books, 2001). Blaschke points out that many missionaries never deal with the questions that the people they are witnessing to are struggling with. The title addresses the need for an answer to the spiritual forces of evil oppressing potential believers. We are reminded of St. Paul's words "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the **powers**, against the world forces of this darkness, against the **spiritual forces** of wickedness in the heavenly *places*." Ephesians 6:12

⁴⁷ A person who was set apart could be become unclean by breaking certain taboos (touching a dead body, etc.). After a prescribed period of time and cleansing actions they were considered clean again and thereby set apart.

God to use. The first born males of beasts or humans were consecrated or sanctified to the Lord. To return them to "ordinary life," they had to be redeemed. (Exodus 13:32)

This setting apart is not restricted to the Old Covenant. We see the same in the New Testament where Peter uses it to indicate believers are chosen to be God's people. (I Peter 2: 9-10). We are set-apart people. We are called in the Epistle to the Hebrews "holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling" yet admonished not to sin and fall away from the living God. (Hebrews 3: 1, 12) Further on we read "in the case of those who have been enlightened and have tasted of the Holy Spirit ... and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them to repentance." (Hebrews 6: 4-6) Leaving aside the interesting question of whether this verse teaches persons can lose their salvation, it is clear in neither passage is the writer speaking of actual holiness but those who have been set apart in the sense of the Old Testament meaning.

The second use of sanctification is of personal holiness. "It designates not merely the fact that believers are formally set apart, or belong to Christ, but they are then to conduct themselves accordingly. They are to live lives of purity and goodness."⁴⁸ This is what we usually mean by sanctification, our growth in Christ-likeness.

For Christians, these two meanings are not mutually exclusive. Any Christian who has lived among professed non-Christians knows that they watch the behavior of Christians. The small band of Christians at my secular university was held to a higher standard of conduct by non-Christians than we held ourselves to within our fellowship. They expected us to live holy lives and their idea of holiness involved a lot of abstinence from activities we considered neutral but the non-Christians considered sinful.⁴⁹ In their eyes, at least, both senses of sanctification, i.e., being separated and being pure, were united.

How does a person become more Christlike? If there was ever an argument for Evangelical *theologoumena*, (i.e. theological opinion) then it is in the discussion of Sanctification.⁵⁰ There is basic agreement that Christians are called to be holy but not agreement on what that holiness looks like or how it is achieved. For some it is by faith alone, for others through a special work of the Holy Spirit, and for others it is faith and the believer's responsible participation. In spite of these differences, I want to point out that we agree Christians are to grow in Christ and purity.

Some traditions focus on avoiding certain behaviors and habits. This perceived legalism has provoked a reaction among Evangelicals in the opposite direction. Fundamentalists (some of whom would strenuously deny being Evangelicals) have external standards for holiness. The

⁴⁸ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, (Baker Book House, 1985), pp. 968-969.

⁴⁹ Lehigh was not only demanding academically, it was also a big party school. While the obvious sins of the flesh were avoided by Christians, activities like having the occasional beer were not viewed as sinful by some Christians but were considered something that Christians didn't do by our unbelieving fellow students.

⁵⁰ C.f. Donald L. Alexander, ed., *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, (Inter Varsity Press, 1988). The five positions covered are Reformed, Lutheran, Wesleyan, Pentecostal and Contemplative. See also Stanley N. Gundry, *Five Views on Sanctification* (Zondervan, 1987). Interestingly this book does not exactly overlap with the first book as it covers Wesleyan, Reformed, Pentecostal but substitutes Keswick (a holiness position) and Augustinian-Dispensational View. Each position in the two books has an author that holds to the view he writes about. The other authors then comment on each viewpoint.

basic ones would be abstinence from alcohol, dancing, use of tobacco, and certain forms of entertainment.⁵¹ All these standards have historical roots which involved other sinful pursuits.

Because of this emphasis on prohibited behavior, Evangelicals are generally as glad to distance themselves from Fundamentalists as the Fundamentalists are to distance themselves from Evangelicals. This distinction is often missed by those outside these two camps with the consequent confusion and confounding of the two positions in the minds of critics.⁵²

This highlights one of the main problems in a discussion of sanctification, namely, that it can quickly devolve into a code of conduct mostly denoted by negatives. We don't do this or that and by abstaining we demonstrate our holiness. But we read in Colossians that these prohibitions: "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch" (Colossians 2:21, NASV) while having the appearance of wisdom are of no value against fleshy indulgence. What Paul is highlighting here is that externals are just that, external. The real battle is in the spirit against the spirits. And because we have died with Christ, we have died to the power of those elemental spirits.

Make no mistake, behavior counts as Paul goes on to say in chapter 3 of Colossians. He asks the Colossians to put aside the evil that comes from within the heart of the person. There is then agreement with the teaching of our Lord who said it is what comes out of the person that defiles, not what the person eats or drinks that defiles. (Matthew 15:17-20) But many standards of holiness are focused on externals, things that are handled, tasted or touched.

What Paul advocates is a recreation into the new image, an image formed after the likeness of our Lord Jesus.⁵³ If we look at the purpose of God from Genesis to Revelation, from creation to eternity, we see God initially created humankind after His own image. That image, now marred by sin, only dimly reflects God. With the Incarnation, a fresh example of the perfect image was found in Christ. Those who believe on His name and follow Him are being recreated into the image of God which we will bear for all eternity. This is sanctification in its fullest sense.

Evangelicals are very concerned, and rightly so, about the mass of humankind that is "without God" and therefore "without hope."⁵⁴ The gospel promises not just "pie in the sky, by and by" but real hope and life here. Whether it is bondage to elemental spirits or fear of economic and political forces over which they have no control, the message is the same: Jesus Christ has all power; there is nothing to fear for those who trust in Him.

A valid criticism is that the push for a salvation decision but not a corresponding emphasis on sanctification. It can appear that the decision to follow Christ is the only thing that matters. It is sometimes assumed that once a person is on the right road, sanctification will happen.⁵⁵ While

⁵¹ Card playing, seeing "Hollywood type" movies, certain types of music; the prohibited lists varied from group to group but included the ones mentioned. Interestingly with the advent of movies on video and cable TV, the prohibition against going to movie theaters, which was a big issue, has diminished.

⁵² For example, James Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 2nd Revised edition (SCM, 1981) where he makes this mistake.

⁵³ 2 Corinthian 5:17, Romans 6:4-8.

⁵⁴ Ephesians 2:12 I have reversed the order as Paul wrote it "without hope and without God" for literary effect.

⁵⁵ This view is contradicted by Jesus in what is generally know as the parable of the sower (Mt.13:3-23, Mark 4:3-20, Luke 8:5-15), which more appropriately should be called the parable of the soil.

sanctification is believed to be vital, two views can derail it. One view doesn't stress sanctification enough and the other turns it into legalism.⁵⁶

Evangelicalism has a hierarchy of spirituality. At the top as the most spiritual are the missionaries, followed by pastors and then those engaged in full-time ministry. I am fairly certain that those in the above named occupations, conscious of their own short-comings and temptations, do not see it that way. I believe, however, that the spiritual ranking I have described pretty well fits across the board for laity. The important thing to note is that these ranking are external, based on what people do. The inner spiritual struggles faced by those considered more spiritual and, unfortunately their failings, are not understood. Actually, I suspect the same is true within Orthodoxy where monastics are considered to have the highest level of spirituality, but their spiritual struggles remain largely unknown to the laity.

Therefore both traditions have a common problem in moving our people beyond "justification" as Evangelicals and "baptism" (and the accompanying signs) as Orthodox into true holy living.

This brings me to a brief discussion of *Theosis*. A concordance search of "justification" turns up a number of passages, depending on which translation you are using. Likewise, if you search the New American Standard Version or the King James Version using "sanctification" you will be rewarded with a number of verses. *Theosis*, however, is not found in our English Bibles. That doesn't mean that the meaning of *Theosis* is missing. In addition to the key passage used to demonstrate the concept, 2 Peter 1:4, where we read we are to "become partakers of the divine nature," I would add all the passages that speak of being created in the image of God.⁵⁷ Personally, I like the term *Theosis* because in it we have a more complete Biblical concept. I have come to embrace a holistic concept of the process of justification (being made righteous) and sanctification (being made holy) so that we conform to the image of God as revealed in Christ. This is my goal in my own life (feeble as my attempts are) and in my encouragement to others.

Other Common Objections

One objection is we cannot claim an unbroken chain of hierarchs from the first century. But as an evangelical Anglican friend told me more than 50 years ago, the important thing is the apostolic succession of doctrine. By this he meant that the doctrine of the New Testament is the doctrine we hold as Evangelicals. I was taught at an evangelical seminary that we accept the theological formulations of the first six Ecumenical Councils. Evangelicals accept these

⁵⁶ Some would maintain that salvation is not complete without holy living while others would believe the elect of God remain elect no matter their spiritual condition at the time of their death.

⁵⁷ "Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the **image** of the heavenly." 1 Corinthians 15:49. "and have put on the **new self** who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the **image** of the One who created him"—Colossians 3:10. "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to *become* conformed to the **image** of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren" Romans 8:29.

decisions for the same reasons the church ultimately accepted them; these are the doctrines of the New Testament.⁵⁸

A point of contention is the apparent disdain of Tradition. This is a tricky subject for two reasons. One is because all churches have their traditions that they follow. The second reason is that all churches ignore portions of their own tradition that for one reason or another are inconvenient. Outdated traditions if not discarded are simply ignored.⁵⁹ We may, to salve our conscience, plead that the part of traditions we are not following is out of synch with the culture or the spirit of the time. Actually, as long as we hold on to the core of the Christian faith, it is a good thing to look at traditions. Kallistos Ware correctly calls some tradition are local customs and wisely says:

Many beliefs held by Orthodox are not part of the one Tradition, but are simply *theologoumena*, theological opinion; and there can be no question of imposing mere matters of opinion on other Christians. Men can possess full unity in faith, and yet hold divergent theological opinions in certain fields.⁶⁰

What Metropolitan Kallistos sees in the Orthodox Church holds true for the differences among evangelicals. The various evangelical Protestant churches hold on to traditions from their history which arose during a period of controversy or as a marker to distinguish their group from other similar churches. These traditions become precious and form part of their identity. Our traditions set us apart and provide a rationale as to why we have formed our distinct group.

There is, however, the normal human tendency for us to want others to agree completely with us. In part this is because we believe we see clearly the truth and want others to see it as well. In part it is because humans are insecure and we can feel threatened by others who claim to hold a different truth. Among evangelicals complete agreement on every detail is unrealistic. The wiser among us know that this is because of sinful human nature.

What evangelicals strive for is agreement on the essentials. Hopefully mature Christians will separate the essential from the non essential. The often quoted: “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity” is a useful phrase.⁶¹ Unfortunately not all Evangelicals agree on the non-essentials!

⁵⁸ I know that I am compressing a lot of church history and that the decisions of the councils were not always accepted immediately. I am not presenting a historical narrative but the decisions as we accept them today. “The first council, that of Nicaea (325), was rejected for more than half a century before it obtained general recognition and came to be regarded as *the* symbol of an ecumenical council par excellence.” John Meyendorff, *The Orthodox Church: It's Past and Its Role in the World Today*, (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1962), p. 30.

⁵⁹ Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, (Penguin, 1963 ed.) Speaking of Canon Law, Ware writes “It must be confessed, however, that at the present day many of the Canons are difficult or impossible to apply, and have fallen widely into disuse.” Pp. 213-214.

⁶⁰ Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 319. Earlier in his book, Ware discusses the difference between Tradition and traditions. Pp. 203-215. His discussion is extremely informative.

⁶¹ Usually attributed to Augustine, this phrase is much later in origin. The best argument seems to be that it comes from a Lutheran theologian, Peter Meiderlin (1582-1651) who wrote under the pen name of Rupertus Meldenus. Cf. <https://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/augustine/quote.html> The Evangelical Free Church deals with this issue by

As noted above, there are differences in worship styles among evangelicals. Some groups believe that simplistic and plain worship better reflects the early church. Others think that the typicon of synagogue worship preserves the pattern of the earliest church.⁶²

We don't see a complete pattern of worship outlined in the New Testament but there seems to be more congregational participation as evidenced by I Corinthians 14: 26 ff. The question arises as to whether St. Paul's prohibition of women speaking applied only in Corinth or was meant to be a universal principle for all times. Some evangelicals take it as an ongoing universal principle.⁶³ Others recognize St. Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts as well as his commendation of his women fellow workers indicate that this injunction was open to change.⁶⁴ There is total agreement that worship is commanded of all Christians. In the same way, the ordinances or sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper (Eucharist) are universally observed by evangelicals.

One criticism from the Orthodox viewpoint might be that evangelicals have shallow worship. I will not defend all Protestant worship or even all evangelical worship. Obviously some forms of worship have more ceremony and gravitas than do others. Frankly I find some varieties of evangelical worship loud and repetitive. If I am, by circumstance, in such a service I go in the foyer or if that is not possible use earplugs and read my Bible. Like our choices in other areas,

not forcing its churches to agree on what they consider non-essentials. *"Once [the early Free Church leaders] began to put in writing what was commonly believed among them, they were silent on those doctrines which through the centuries had divided Christians of equal dedication, Biblical knowledge, spiritual maturity and love for Christ.' This 'significance of silence' reflected our strong concern for Evangelical unity in the gospel."* <https://national-office.ministries.efca.org/theological-faq>

⁶² Useful is the volume by Benjamin D. Williams and Harold B. Anstall, *Orthodox Worship: A Living Continuity with the Synagogue, the Temple, and the Early Church*, (Ancient Faith Publishing, 2019) Cf. the review by Brandi Willis Schreiber, "Orthodox Worship: Changing the Way I Approach the Divine Liturgy" (April 8, 2019). <https://blogs.ancientfaith.com/behind-the-scenes/2019/04/08/orthodox-worship-changing-the-way-i-approach-the-divine-liturgy/>

⁶³ I recently served on our local church's Pastoral Search Committee. Some who we interviewed were adamantly opposed to allowing women to have any ministry except with other women and children. They held the prohibition against teaching to apply today and would not allow a woman to teach men. In contrast to this rigid position, I appreciate the Orthodox Church's acceptance of female theologians from whom I have learned much, e.g. Frederica Matthews-Green. The Orthodox Christian Studies Center recently had a 14 part lecture series "Women Scholars of Orthodox Christianity" which featured prominent Orthodox women. The Eagle River Institute, which I highly recommend, has a very interesting talk by Carrie Frederick Frost, "DOES THE ORTHODOX CHURCH HAVE A WOMAN PROBLEM?" <https://eagleriverinstitute.org/series/does-the-orthodox-church-have-a-woman-problem>

⁶⁴ Paul had women who worked alongside with him. E.g. Acts 18:26 where Priscilla and Aquila taught Apollos more adequately. In Romans 16:7 he refers to Junia (a feminine name) as outstanding among the apostles. The list in Romans 16 includes Pricilla and Aquila (co-workers), Mary (who worked hard for you), and Tryphena and Tryphosa (those women who work hard in the Lord). In Philippians St. Paul urges "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. . . I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in *the cause of the gospel*, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life." (4:2-3) Not getting along as Christians is an old problem!

we chose a worship style that is comfortable. This may sound offensive to Orthodox ears and for this I apologize. But we all know individuals, nominal Orthodox included, who remove themselves from certain types of worship.

The proper form of worshipping God is a point of contention. We are so intent in maintaining we have the approved form of worship that we can't see that someone else might be equally sincere in their devotion. And furthermore it is just possible that God is pleased with both types of worship. But isn't there a right way, a way that is more pleasing to God? Possibly there is.

But just like a child who tries to please his earthly father with his artwork, however imperfect it might appear to someone else, so our heavenly Father is pleased with our efforts. Keeping the same metaphor, if the child grew up to be a great artist, his earthly father would expect a more polished drawing than that of a child. My point is not that one is better than the other to an outside observer. My point is that we as Christians serve an audience of One God. We should not be concerned what others think if in our hearts we are seeking to please God. We need the humility to recognize that God is pleased with the variety of worship that He receives.

So yes, Orthodoxy means "right praise." But our Father is pleased with the babble of babies. May we all grow up in Christ so that we can understand that offering praise is what worship is all about and God welcomes all our sincere efforts at praise. When we join the great throng around the throne praising God we will marvel at the variety of praise we are part of.

I have attempted to demonstrate the unity of the evangelical movement while freely admitting its diversity. There are areas where we disagree. But there is a core area of agreement, greater than the differences between us. We can recognize each other, both in seeing in the other the same faith and also in acknowledging the validity of the other's expression of our common faith.

A concluding thought

Father John Meyendorff was extremely helpful to me as I was writing my doctoral dissertation and we had many fine discussions. I once asked Fr. John how he would answer the question "Are you saved?"

His reply: "I was saved, I am being saved, I will be saved." His answer is the essence of St. Paul's teaching.

The problem seems to be that some Evangelicals stop at "I was saved" and somehow think it is enough. Without our entering into the debates on the perseverance of Christians, it seems to me that all of us, while affirming the initial (and important) step in the Christian faith, need to preach and teach the "*being saved*" aspect of the faith. For some in both of our respective traditions, the absence of "I was saved" has led to individuals converting to another tradition. The complaint is most often lodged against Evangelicals who are accused of proselytizing. But the knife cuts both ways and there have been those who have turned to Orthodoxy to find more substance to "I am *being saved*."

May we all know the joy of being able to say, with Father John, all three are true in our lives and may the Holy Spirit guide us into an understanding between our two traditions.