

The Impact of Orthodox Church Tradition-as-Authority on the Identity and Theology of Evangelical Christians in the Commonwealth of Independent States

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“I revere the fullness of His Scripture...”
Tertullian^[1].

*“But let them believe without the Scriptures,
if their object is to believe contrary to the Scriptures”*
Tertullian^[2].

*“Tradition is only a means of interpretation,
a relative authority, a norma normata.
The norma normans is the living Word of God itself”*^[3].

“Your word, o Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens” (Ps. 119:89). But can we state the same thing about Church Tradition? What is Eastern Orthodox Church Tradition: “slavish imitation of the past”^[4] or a sacred “continuum of fidelity”^[5], another stream that “flows into the same pool of divine revelation”^[6].

The necessity of approaching the complicated issue of Scripture and Tradition relationship and its authority from the perspective of contemporary Evangelical theology does not include only a theological interest and practical implications, but also presumes (1 Peter 3:15) that all Christians, including Protestants, have always been called on to defend their integrity of faith, certainly no less today than at any other time in history.

^[1] Tertullian Q.S. *Against Hermogenes*, chap. XXII, as quoted by Cleveland Coxe in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Vol. III, Latin Christianity. N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing Co. 1885. — P. 490.

^[2] Tertullian Q.S. *The Prescription Against Heretics*, chap. XXIII, as quoted by Cleveland Coxe in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Vol. III, Latin Christianity. N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing Co. 1885. — P. 254.

^[3] *Biblical Authority for Today* / ed. by Richardson A., Schweitzer W. — Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1951. — P. 110.

^[4] Congar Y. *The Meaning of Tradition* / Y. Congar. — San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004. — P. 3.

^[5] *The Quadrilog: Tradition and the Future of Ecumenism* / ed. by K. Hagen — Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1994 — P. 287–311.

^[6] Rhodes R. *Reasoning from the Scriptures with Catholics* / R. Rhodes — Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishing, 2000. — P. 48.



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Many Evangelical Christians, who came out of mighty revivals of early 90s in Russia and the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), still have a significant Orthodox background, looking for a distinct Christian identity. The key theological problem, which emerges here, is the validity and authority of Orthodox traditions for Evangelical Christians who live and serve the Lord in a predominantly Orthodox setting. In recent years the division and tensions between post-soviet Evangelicals and postmodern Paleo-orthodox run so deep that a new investigation in this field is called for to extend the boundary of fundamental knowledge of Eastern Orthodoxy in general, and the authority of Orthodox church tradition in particular.

Contemporary Evangelical theology needs to facilitate the formation of a distinctive Evangelical approach toward the issue of authority of Orthodox Church tradition for Evangelical Christians in Russia and the CIS countries in both conceptual development (theological articulation of modern Protestant position) and practical apologetic implications of theological advancement in understanding historical, hermeneutical, Christological and theological aspects of the the issue.

Historical and hermeneutical considerations of the problem relate to the question that confronted the early church: “Whether tradition was creative or subordinate? Does church tradition simply reaffirm the revelation given in Scripture, or does it contribute new light not to be found in Scripture? Is tradition dependent on what Scripture records or is it independent in the sense that it can define new truth? Or are Scripture and Tradition interdependent in the sense that neither has efficacy apart from the other?”¹⁷¹.

Christological approach toward Orthodox Church tradition, from the Protestant point of view, assumes that the dilemma of two sources of revelation with equal authority (Scripture and Oral Tradition) has not only a bibliocentric, but predominantly a Christocentric solution. Ultimately, any authority is claimed for Christ alone (Matt. 28:18). The true foundation of our faith is not the Bible, but Jesus Christ. “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). The Bible is the unique story of the progressive self-disclosure of God in crucial events for mankind. It is the story of the redemptive activity of God culminating in Jesus Christ. For that reason, we as his disciples cannot ignore Christ’s attitude toward the oral tradition of the elders.

Our Lord and Savior, being sent in the beginning of his ministry “only to the lost sheep of Israel” (Matt. 15:24), nonetheless refused to associate himself with any political or religious group of that time in Judea. The ruling spiritual aristocracy was irritated that his disciples “were unschooled, ordinary men” (Acts 4:13). The Son of Man did not become the son of human tradition. Moreover, he declared himself “the Lord of the Sabbath” (Luke 6:5), Christ indicated that the oral tradition from now is not of sacred, but of ministerial nature. His criticism of “merely human rules” (Matt. 15:9) had a clear goal of protecting God’s commandment from distortions of human religiosity.

A well-articulated example is given in the gospel of Mark (7:13), where the negative connotation of the phrase “Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition...” is strengthened by the adjective “τη μωρα” – “your foolish tradition” in most

¹⁷¹ Bloesch G. Donald. Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration & Interpretation / G. Donald. Bloesch – Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1994. – P. 143.

Latin and Syriac manuscripts.^[8] In addition to that Jesus said “Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). He never said “tradition cannot be broken”.

Therefore, one of the basic problems confronting theologians today is to be able to distinguish clearly between the faithful voice of God’s Revelation and mere human traditions which only express the former imperfectly or, as is often the case, are the contrary to it or obscure it. Many people are eager to receive the Gospel in its original purity and to know the Church as its divine Founder intended it to be, but are not eager to become involved in the interminable medieval quarrels about traditions which have resulted in the disunity of Christendom^[9].

The problem of theological incongruence between the two entities of “Scripture” and “Tradition” remains insoluble as long as it is not expanded to the understanding that “we are in process of moving too far from the time of the apostles to be able to watch over the purity of tradition, without a superior written authority”^[10].

Terrence Tilley, a Roman Catholic theologian, has recently made a comprehensive study to demonstrate that certain beliefs and practices deemed “traditional” by the church hierarchy are not found in the previous ages of the church in their present form or have no precedent at all. “If that which is passed on as a tradition has to be passed on ‘unchanged and uncorrupted’ over long periods of time, then there are no concrete traditions that will pass the test”^[11].

Thus, we have come to the point where we are to inquire, “Does the voice of Orthodox Church Tradition express the same historical authenticity of the Apostolic Church as well as the theological truthfulness of the Church Fathers?”

Alternative Approach toward the Issue of Scripture and Tradition Development in the Patristic Legacy

George Florovsky defined the normativity of the patristic legacy in the following way, “The Church is apostolic indeed, but the Church is also patristic”^[12]. Our task is to investigate closely how the proto-Orthodox church community developed Christian traditions in relation to Scripture and other principle doctrines found in the Church Fathers’ writings.

As Protestants we must admit the fact, that, “The existence of unwritten apostolic tradition is therefore a certainty”^[13]. Some Protestant scholars even believe that the principle *Sola Scriptura* “was never intended to cast tradition aside in the task of interpretation and theological construction, contrary to some predominant evangelical perception of this principle”^[14].

[8] Perspective on the New Testament. Essays in Honour of Frank Stagg / ed. by Charles Talbert – Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1985. – P. 41.

[9] Meyendorff J. The Orthodox Church: Its past and its role in the world today / J. Meyendorff – [translated from the French by John Chapin]. – N.Y.: Pantheon books, 1960. – P. ix.

[10] Cullmann O. La Tradition: Probleme exegetique, historique et theologique / O. Cullmann. – Paris: Neuchatel, 1953. – P. 44.

[11] Terrence W. Tilley. Inventing Catholic Tradition / W. Tilley. Terrence. – Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2000. – P. 27.

[12] Florovsky G. Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View / G. Florovsky – Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1972. – P. 107.

[13] Congar Yves. The Meaning of Tradition / Yves. Congar. – San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004 – P. 35.

[14] Evangelicals Scripture. Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics / ed. by V. Bacote – Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2004. – P. 16.

On the other hand, being increasingly relativized by various geo-political and national factors, the Orthodox apology of the Tradition often exploits very selective quotations from the patristic heritage to prove its own agenda. For example, we know from history that Clement of Rome as a bishop had to deal with the delicate problem of the revolt at Corinth, which caused schism and rivalry in the congregation. In his letter to Corinth (1 Clement 7.2) he urged both parties to adjust their approaches and “*turn to the glorious and holy rule of our tradition*”^[15]. Unfortunately, both Catholics and Orthodox have utilized his phrase to defend their own notion of Tradition, ignoring the fact that Clement’s initial intention was to bring peace to the congregation and restore church order.

The Orthodox approach affirms the primacy of Tradition over Scripture, since “the oral transmission of the Apostles’ preaching preceded its written recording in the canon of the New Testament. It will even be said that the Church could dispense with the Scripture, but could not exist without the Tradition”^[16].

However, “an apostolic and ancient tradition” did not mean that everything “ancient” was therefore automatically “apostolic”. All the Orthodox theologians knew that in some instances “antiquity means foolishness”^[17]. The French Catholic theologian George Tavard believes that tradition formation was not an infallible process of delivering the true doctrine of the church. Since the transmission of faith is at all levels tied up with time, language, and culture, there is always change, and change is inherently imperfect^[18].

The historical ground for Protestant opposition to the Orthodox approach to the authority of Tradition is in the clear notion that patristic tradition was not a new set of beliefs and practices added to Scripture, as if it were a separate and second revelatory source. O. Cullmann states, that, “By the very fact of laying down the principle of a canon, the Church recognized that from that moment tradition was no longer a criterion of truth. She has drawn a line under the apostolic tradition... Laying down a canon is equivalent to agreeing that from now on our ecclesiastical tradition needs to be controlled”^[19].

The attempt of Orthodox apologists to derive their own extra-scriptural traditions directly from the Apostolic Tradition and Apostolic “Rule of Faith” does not consider the scrutiny of historical and documentary evidence. George Florovsky explains that, “There were no conciliar theory in the ancient church, no elaborate theology of the councils, and even no fixed canonical regulations”^[20].

The appeal of the Church Fathers to unwritten tradition of apostolic origin “was actually an appeal to the faith of the church, to her *sensus catholicus*, to the φρονήμα

^[15] Magill F.N. Masterpieces of Catholic Literature in Summary Form / F. N. Magill. – New York: Harper & Row, 1965. – Vol. 1. – P. 4–5.

^[16] Ouspensky L., Lossky V. Tradition and Traditions / L. Ouspensky, V. Lossky // The Meaning of icons – NY: St Vladimir Seminary Press, 1982. – P. 12.

^[17] Pelican J. The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine / J. Pelican – Vol. 2.: The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700) – Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977. – P. 22.

^[18] The Quadrigal: Tradition and the Future of Ecumenism / ed. by K. Hagen – Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1994. – P. 287–311.

^[19] Cullmann O. La Tradition: Probleme exegetique, historique et theologique / O. Cullmann – Paris: Neuchatel, 1953. – P. 44.

^[20] Florovsky G. The Authority of the Ancient Councils and the Tradition of Fathers in Eastern Orthodox Theology, A Contemporary Reader / G. Florovsky; ed. by D. Clendenin – 2nd edition – Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic and Paternoster Press, 2004. – P. 116.

εκκλησιαστικον (ecclesiastical mind)”^[21]. *A whole group of prominent scholars including H. Dorries, J. A. Jungmann, D.D. Amand hold the view that the unwritten tradition in rites and symbols did not add anything significant to the content of the scriptural faith; it only put this faith in focus*^[22].

C. Turner was very precise in stating that, “When Christians spoke of the ‘Rule of Faith’ as Apostolic, they did not mean that the Apostles had met and formulated it. What they meant was that the profession of belief which every catechumen recited before his baptism did embody in summary form the faith which the Apostles had taught and had committed to their disciples to teach after them. This profession was the same everywhere, although the actual phrasing could vary from place to place”^[23].

Orthodox self-awareness as Nicene “orthodoxy” shaped itself into distinctive church tradition only after many centuries of theological disputes and inner development. According to Jaroslav Pelican, only “by the seventh century, what we have called “catholic orthodoxy in the East” bore its own doctrinal identity”^[24].

The Orthodox theologian A. Schmemmann explains that a negative key feature of the development was the desire of Eastern Christendom to preserve the Greek nature of the Church, rather than the universal Church of the earlier period^[25]. In addition to that, “for most of the early history of Christianity, there were at least two acknowledged sides to the tradition: (1) the apologetic-polemical, which sought to depict the tradition as linear and unchanging against heretical claims of divine revelation, and (2) the interecclesial, which admitted the existence of a certain fringe or “loose ends” concerning what the church teaches”^[26].

The Orthodox apology of Church tradition often misses the point that “in the patristic mind, tradition and scripture were comprehended in reciprocal terms. While Scripture had primacy of place for the fathers, they did not believe that Scripture could or should function in the lives of believers apart from the church’s teaching and language of worship (i.e. tradition). Scripture was the authoritative anchor of tradition’s content, and tradition stood as the primary interpreter of Scripture”^[27].

Thomas Oden asserts that, “Preaching at the end of the first millennium focused primarily on the text of Scripture...”^[28]. Church Tradition did not prelude or domi-

^[21] Florovsky G. *The Function of Tradition in the Ancient Church in Eastern Orthodox Theology, A Contemporary Reader* / G. Florovsky; ed. by D. Clendenin – 2nd edition – Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic and Paternoster Press, 2004. – P. 111.

^[22] Dörries H. *De Spiritu Sancto, Der Beitrag des Basilius zum Abschluss des Trinitarischen Dogmas* / Dörries H. – Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956. – P.19-120.

^[23] Turner C. *Apostolic Succession in Essays on the Early History of the Church and the Ministry* / C. H. Turner; – ed. by H. B. Swete – London, 1918. – P. 101–2.

^[24] Pelican J. *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* / J. Pelican

– Vol. 2.: *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)* – Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977. – P. 6.

^[25] Schmemmann A. *Church, World, Mission: Reflection on Orthodoxy in the West* / A. Schmemmann – Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1979. – P. 98.

^[26] Williams D. H. *Evangelicals and Tradition: The Formative Influence of the Early Church* / D. H. Williams – Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005. – P. 22–23.

^[27] *Ibid.*, P. 93.

^[28] Oden T. S. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. New Testament* / T. S. Oden – Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2002. – P. xi.

nate the primacy of scriptural authority. Cyril of Jerusalem taught that “the most important doctrines were collected from the whole of Scripture to make up a single exposition of the faith”^[29].

His criteria for the verification of the truth is almost identical to the methods of Evangelical theology, “One must not teach even minor points without reference to the sacred Scripture, or be led astray lightly by persuasive and elaborate arguments. Do not simply take my word when I tell you these things, unless you are given proof for my teaching from Holy Scripture”^[30].

In patristic writings there was no question about the supreme authority of the Bible. Alexander Vedernikov was one of many Orthodox, who dared to question the primacy of Tradition over the Scripture. In his article “The problem of Tradition in Orthodox Theology” he pointed out the opinion of Tertullian, who professed the following, “I revere the fullness of Scripture”^[31], and he also quoted Athanasius of Alexandria who believed that Scripture is “sufficient in itself to distinguish the Truth”^[32].

Protestants’ cautious approach to Tradition is explainable by the fact that they are able to hear the voice of history. For example, Origen in the second century warned us, “We are not ignorant that many of these secret writings have been composed by impious men, from among those who make their iniquity sound loudest, and that some of these fictions are used by the “Hypythiani”, others, by the disciples of Basilides. We must then pay attention, in order to receive all the apocrypha, which circulate under the names of saints, for some have been composed by the Jews, perhaps to destroy the truth of our Scriptures, and to establish a false doctrine...”^[33].

The elevation of mind is in listening and putting into practice the words of Scripture, “Test everything. Hold on to the good” (1Thes. 5: 21). There are some examples of the Church Fathers’ alternative rhetoric regarding a tradition,

Ignatius of Antioch, To the Philadelphians 8.2; 9.1.

“For me, my archives, they are Jesus Christ; my inviolable archives are His cross and His death and His resurrection, and the faith comes from him... He is the Door of the Father, by which Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the prophets, and the Apostles, and the Church enter”^[34].

John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew 51.1

“From this it is clear that the priests were insinuating many new practices, even thought Moses with great fear and with dreadful words has commanded that one should neither add nor take away anything. For he says, “Do not add this word that I command-

^[29] Yarnold E. Cyril of Jerusalem. The Early Church Fathers / E. Yarnold – London: Routledge, 2000. – P. 113.

^[30] Ibid., 103.

^[31] Vedernikov A. The problem of Tradition in Orthodox theology / A. Vedernikov // Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate – 1961. – № 10. – P 63.

^[32] Ibid., 63.

^[33] Ouspensky L., Lossky V. Tradition and traditions / Leonid Ouspensky, Vladimir Lossky // The Meaning of icons – N.Y.: St Vladimir Seminary Press, 1982. – P. 17–18.

^[34] Clendenin D. B. Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader / D. B. Clendenin; ed. by D. B. Clendenin – 2nd edition – Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic and Paternoster Press, 2004. – P. 132.

ing you today, and do not take away from it” (Deut. 4:2). But this did not at all stop them from instituting new practices... Why did they turn things upside down? Because they were afraid that someone might take away their power”^[35].

Theodore of Mopsuestia, Fragments 79.10-15

“The scribes were entirely preoccupied with something else. The Lord instead was teaching them to take care of the needs of the body, so long as they were encouraged to cultivate virtue... What reply, then, does the Lord make to this? “Why do you transgress the commandments of God for the sake of your tradition?” Thus he reframes the question into an even graver accusation. They had not only broken God’s command but also misused it for mistaken ends... In this way, by your own peculiar traditions, you yourselves are dishonoring the gifts of almighty God”^[36].

Chromatius of Aquileia, Tractate on Mathew 53:7

“Since the scribes and Pharisees had burst forth in great arrogance and transgressed the divine law, they “planted” their own precepts but not God’s. They wanted these to be observed as divine law. So, not without good reason, did they too, with this planting of their own doctrine, deserve to be uprooted by the Lord.”^[37].

Unfortunately, the Orthodox Church did not have an immunity against copying the same progressive apostasy of great apostolic tradition to simply human customs and rules, planted “of their own doctrine”. You may examine this discrepancy on your own in the chart below:

Orthodox theologian	Church Father, Apologist
Andrey Kuraev	TERTULLIAN
<i>To Protestants about Orthodoxy</i>	<i>On Baptism Chapter XVIII</i>
Chapter 4. Can we baptize children or babies? ^[38] .	“Of the persons to whom, and the time when, baptism is to be administered” ^[39] .
1. “Yes, the child does not know what the Church is and what principles it is built on. But the Church is not a philosophical club, not just a gathering of like-minded people...” ^[40] .	1. “But they whose office it is, know that baptism is not rashly to be administered”.
2. “Are children excommunicated from God? Or are they are alien to Christ? Isn’t it absurd to leave the children outside of	2. “On the contrary, this precept is rather to be looked at carefully: ‘Give not the holy thing to the dogs, nor cast your pearls
^[35] Oden T. S. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. New Testament / T. S. Oden – Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2002. – P. 17.	Slovo, Palomnik (reprint), 2003.
^[36] Ibid., 18-19.	^[39] Rev. Roberts A., Donaldson J. The Writings of Tertullian: Ante Nicene Christian Library Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325 Part Eleven / A. Rev. Roberts, J. Donaldson – Edinburg: T&T Clark, 1870. – P. 252–254.
^[37] Ibid., 23.	^[40] Kuraev 2003, P. 94.
^[38] Kuraev A. P. To Protestants about Orthodoxy / A. P. Kuraev – Rostov-na-Donu: Troitskoe	

Christ (and the baptism is understood by all Christians to be a door which introduces the person into the Church of Christ) for the sole reason that the rules of Roman law do not see them as those with the signs of “competence”?^[41].

3. “And this petition for the gift of clear conscience - is it premature for a baby? Of course, a baby cannot promise anything, but isn't it able to ask? Is not all his being a mere asking?”^[42].

4. “And in the New Testament texts we see the description of events, which involve the baptism of children together with adults. Lydia and her household were baptized (Acts 16:15); the jailer ‘and all his household’ (Acts. 16:31); Paul baptized Stephan’s family and it is quite possible that there were minors. According to the Apostle Paul there are “children who believe” (and elders should be appointed only if they are people who have such children (see Titus 1:6))”^[43].

5. “But there is a positive meaning in baptism, in fact, it is above subjectivity. Baptism is not merely an external manifestation of the inner intention of a person (‘the answer of a good conscience toward God’). Baptism is an event that changed the world in which a man lives”^[44].

6. “Baptism is a door leading to the people of God, and it’s not a legal ‘acquisition of citizenship rights’, but joining to

before swine;’ and, ‘Lay not hands easily on any; share not other men’s sins.’”

3. “God’s approbation sends sure premonitory tokens (praerogativas) before it; every ‘petition’ [of man] may both deceive and be deceived”.

4. “And so, according to the circumstances and disposition, and even age, of each individual, the delay of baptism is preferable; principally, however, in the case of little children. For why is it necessary if (baptism itself) is not so necessary that the sponsors likewise should be thrust into danger? Who both themselves, by reason of mortality, may fail to fulfil their promises, and may be disappointed by the development of an evil disposition, in those for whom they stood? The Lord does indeed say, ‘Forbid them not to come unto me’ (Matt. 19, 14)”.

5. “If Philip so “easily” baptized the chamberlain, let us reflect that a manifest and conspicuous evidence that the Lord deemed him worthy had been interposed. The Spirit had enjoined Philip to proceed to that road: the eunuch himself, too, was not found idle, nor as one who was suddenly seized with an eager desire to be baptized; but, after going up to the temple for prayer’s sake, being intently engaged on the divine Scripture” (Acts 8:27-28).

6. “Let them “come”, then, while they are growing up; let them “come” while they are learning, while they are learning

^[41] Ibid., 94.

^[42] Ibid., 103.

^[43] Ibid., 105–106.

^[44] Ibid., 96.

the Body of Christ, receiving the blessed cover, and gracious help”^[45].

7. “It is true, you can’t force a person. But why should we consider babies to be demons? What reasons do we have to believe that they are opposed to union with Christ? Do Protestants agree with the statement of Tertullian, that the human soul is Christian in its nature?... And what do we have? Does it mean that babies are so evil that they have no place in the Church and that their baptism can only be described as violence against their will?”^[46].

whither to come; let them become Christians when they have become able to know Christ. Why does the innocent period of life hasten to the “remission of sins?”

7. “Let them know how to “ask” for salvation, that you may seem (at least) to have given “to him that asketh” (Luke. 6, 30)... If any understand the weighty import of baptism, they will fear its reception more than its delay: sound faith is secure of salvation”.

Here we come to the main problem of the Orthodox theology of Tradition, which John Meyendorff defined as follows, “...the necessary distinction between holy tradition itself and human traditions, which may well carry on precious truths but are not absolute in themselves, and which may furthermore easily become spiritual obstacles for true theology, as were those human traditions that Jesus himself condemned (Mark 7:1-13)”^[47]. It is easy to compare, for example, “apostolic” remains in the field of baptism with modern derivatives of Orthodox Tradition:

The Apostles’ teaching on baptism

Orthodox Tradition on baptism

Baptized adults

Baptize infants

Demanded personal faith

No demand of personal faith

Gave edification in faith before the baptism

Edification in faith is put off for some indefinite period of time

Baptized by full immersion

Baptize mostly through sprinkling

The presence of fruits of transformed life, an active ministry in the local church

The absence of fruits of transformed life, passive “congregation”

The information we see in both charts above clearly indicates what the early Church father Cyprian affirmed: “Nor ought custom, which had crept in among some, to prevent the truth from prevailing and conquering; for custom without truth is the *antiquity of error*”^[48].

^[45] Ibid., 96.

^[46] Ibid., 94.

^[47] Meyendorff J. *Doing Theology in an Eastern Orthodox Perspective in Eastern*

Orthodox Theology, A Contemporary Reader / Meyendorff J.; ed. by D. Clendenin – 2nd edition – Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic and Paternoster Press, 2004. – P. 90.

Blessed Augustine taught in his work “On Baptism” “The Lord says in the gospel, ‘I am the Truth.’ He does not say, ‘I am custom.’ Therefore, when the truth is made manifest, custom must give way to truth. Clearly, no one could doubt that custom should give way to truth where it is made manifest”^[49].

Irenaeus of Lyons, to whom the Catholic Church gave the special title of “a man of tradition (paradosis)” and whom the modern theologians consider “the thrill of tradition”^[50] offers a very simple way to verify the Tradition, which is very similar to the position of Evangelical Theology:

“For if what they produce is the Gospel of Truth, and is different from those which the apostles handed down to us, those who care to can learn how it can be shown from the Scriptures themselves that [then] what is handed down from the apostles is not the Gospel of Truth”^[51].

Irenaeus did not speculate about the authority of the Scripture being a practical theologian and not a formal philosopher. He provided the framework of formal theology which reveres the Scripture and vigorously asserts its authority for Christians, “For we learned the plan of our salvation from no others than from those through whom the gospel came to us. They first preached it abroad, and then later by the will of God handed it down to us in Writings, to be the foundations and pillar of our faith”^[52].

Therefore, we may summarize that there is a considerable theological difference between the modern Orthodox approach toward the patristic legacy and the initial Scripture-focused theology of the Church Fathers. As we noted above, in the earliest stages of the Christian Church “there was no tension between the gospel as revelation and the gospel as tradition. Revelation and tradition were but two sides of one coin”^[53]. Christian proto-tradition was predominantly kerygmatic-catechetical and ethical and only to some extent liturgical. Ancient Church tradition developed as the primary interpreter of Scripture and was not “the content of revelation, but the light that reveals it; it is not the word, but the living breath...”^[54]. In contrast to the modern Orthodox position, “the early church had no doubt about the sufficiency of the Scriptures, and never tried to go beyond, and always claimed not to have gone beyond”^[55].

Regarding the content of its message, Williams suggests, “It is apparent that this foundational element of tradition has to do with those summaries of the Christian message, focused on the death and resurrection of Christ”^[56]. In terms of the authority

^[48] The Writings of Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage / [translated by Rev. R. E. Wallis] – Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1868. – Vol. I. – P. 283.

^[49] Augustine, On Baptism, Against the Donatists, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. IV – St. Augustine: The Writings against the Manichaeans, and against the Donatists / St. Augustine – ed. by Schaff P. – N.Y.: Cosimo Classics – 2007 (1887) – P. 439.

^[50] Moffatt J. The Thrill of Tradition / J. Moffatt – N.Y.: The Macmillan Company, 1944. – P. 71.

^[51] Early Christian Fathers / [Newly translated and edited by Cyril C. Richardson] – N.Y.: Collier Books, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1970. – P. 384.

^[52] Ibid., 370.

^[53] Bruce F. F. Tradition: Old and New / F. F. Bruce – Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970. – P. 31–32.

^[54] Clendenin D. B. Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader / D. B. Clendenin – 2nd edition – Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003. – P. 133–134.

^[55] Florovsky G. The Authority of the Ancient Councils and the Tradition of Fathers in Eastern Orthodox Theology. A Contemporary Reader / G. Florovsky; ed. by D. Clendenin – 2nd edition – Grand Rapids: Baker Academic and Paternoster Press, 2004. – P. 119

^[56] Williams D. H. Retrieving the Tradition & Renewing Evangelicalism. A Primer for Suspi-

of the tradition, Orthodox theologian John Meyendorff recognizes that, “The issue of tradition arises inevitably, but certainly not in terms of a second source of revelation (fortunately, no one would defend such terms today)... In this sense, tradition becomes the initial and fundamental source of Christian theology – not in competition with Scripture, but as Scripture’s spiritual context”^[57].

Orthodox Theology of Tradition in the Postmodern Context

In recent years, the issue of church tradition authority has been at the forefront of theological discussions in Orthodox literature with the dominating theological framework of a “one-only-true church” perspective. “Its unrelenting insistence that it alone is the only true church of Christ on earth must be questioned, especially as it impinges upon the necessity of Christian unity”^[58].

One common feature that shapes both normative and practical dimensions of the Orthodox theology has to do with new church awareness of superiority and exclusivity of their own Church Tradition. In the theological aspect “ultimately, the conflict between East and West resides in two conflicting spiritual perceptions of tradition”^[59]. George Florovsky indicates that common understanding between East and West will be possible only when “the common universe of discourse” is recovered^[60].

The subject is made more complex in that there are two main schools of thought within Orthodox approach. The first group of Orthodox theologians (A. Andreopoulos, D. Bogdashevski, S. Bulgakov, P. Gillquist, Hilarion (Troitsky), A. Khomiakov, A. Kuraev, V. Lossky, N. Maseko, L. Ouspensky, M. Pomazansky, Raphael (Karelin), D. Staniloae, T. Ware V. Zenkovskiy,) researched a wide range of historical, theological and spiritual perspectives of Orthodox Church tradition. They criticized the “western captivity” of Orthodox theology and held Eastern Orthodox Tradition in high esteem, declaring steady conformity of Orthodox Tradition with the apostolic and universal teaching of the Church. Their theology and conceptual development, based on the conviction that the Orthodox Church is the only “pillar and bulwark of truth” (1 Timothy 3:15), may be characterized as neopatristic synthesis or postmodern paleo-orthodoxy.

The second group of Orthodox scholars (N. Berdyaev, A. Borisov, P. Chaadayev, G. Florovsky, P. Meshcherinov, J. Meyendorff, A. Schmemmann, V. Solov’ev, A. Vedernikov, H. Zernov) may be classified as critics of the institutional Russian Orthodox Church, whose teachings represent a new trend within Orthodox Tradition with the emphasis on the creation of a new Orthodox identity and genuine revival of Orthodox theology. Their approach to the issue of Church tradition authority has provoked some interesting and critical discussions in the field and is notable for its progressive orientation which can be broadly defined as Orthodox neo-renewal (revivalism).

cious Protestants / D. H. Williams – Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. – P. 53–54.

^[57] Meyendorff J. *Doing Theology in an Eastern Orthodox Perspective: A Contemporary Reader* / Meyendorff J. – ed. by D. Clendenin – 2nd edition – Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic and Paternoster Press, 2004. – P. 82-83.

^[58] Clendenin 2003, P. 149.

^[59] Meyendorff J. *Catholicity and the Church* / J. Meyendorff – Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1983. – P. 97.

^[60] Florovsky G. *Christianity and Culture* // *Collected Works*. Vol. 2 – Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1974. – P. 161–162.

The danger of unnecessary elevation of Oral Tradition in Eastern Orthodoxy continually nourishes a distinctive “*folk theology*” where the dead are still ruling the living in the area of both liturgy and theology. A holy relic of Matrona is getting much bigger crowds in Russia in our days than the lectures of the Orthodox professor A. Osipov. Here are the words of Matrona about herself written in *The Life Story of the Blessed Elder Matrona*, “When I die, come to my grave, I will always be there, do not seek anyone else. Do not seek anyone lest you should deceive yourselves^[61]... Cling to my heel, you all, and thus you will be saved. Do not draw away from me; take a fast hold of me... Behold, I see a dream: I am standing and watching the Mother enclosing herself in a general’s uniform of czarist time. It has a shoulder knot and a striped cross belt. And she is pinning a great many of medals to it. So I ask her, “Mother, what are they?” She answers, “These are the regalia – my merits in God’s eyes”. I ask, “Where are you going dressed like that?”. And she replies in a discontented tone, “How do you ask me where! To bow before the God of Sabaoth Himself”^[62]. In the whole book there is a single Scripture reference.

Many theologians within the Orthodox approach to Scripture and Church tradition advocate the idea of internal truth within and living in the church – the Spirit of God himself. Their criteria for theological method in Orthodoxy is rather pneumatic than dogmatic. According to Alexei Khomiakov, “neither individuals, nor a multitude of individuals within the church preserve a tradition... but the Spirit of God which lives in the whole body of the Church”^[63].

The recovery of apophatic notion of Tradition in Orthodox postmodern theology is confronted by the unsettling complexities of both practical theology and hermeneutical methodology. For example, Michael Pomazansky in his fundamental work “*Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*” gives the following definition of Tradition:

“We find this sacred ancient Tradition

- a) in the most ancient record of the Church, the Canons of the Holy Apostles;
- b) in the Symbols of Faith of the ancient local churches;
- c) in the ancient Liturgies, in the rite of Baptism, and in other ancient prayers;
- d) in the ancient Acts of the Christian martyrs...
- e) in the ancient records of the history of the church, especially in the book of Eusebius Pamphili, Bishop of Caesarea, where are gathered many ancient traditions of rite and dogma – in particular, there is given the canon of the sacred books of the Old and New Testaments;
- f) in the works of the ancient Fathers and teachers of the Church;
- g) and, finally, in the very spirit of the Church’s life, in the preservation of faithfulness to all her foundations which come from the Holy Apostles”^[64].

^[61] Zhdanova Z. V. *The Life Story of the Blessed Elder Matrona* / Z. V. Zhdanova – Svyato-Troitsky Novo-Goluvin monastery: Kolomna, 1993. – P. 116.

^[62] *Ibid.*, 97, 119–120.

^[63] Khomiakov A. *The Church is One* / A. S.

Khomiakov // *Russia and the English Church* / W. J. Birkbeck – London: S.P.C.K., 1953. – P. 198.

^[64] Pomazansky M. *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* / M. Pomazansky – 3rd edition – Platina: Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2005. – P. 38–39.

The above definition, being typical for other Orthodox sources, was highly criticized by the prominent Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky, who stated that, “Tradition (Paradosis-Traditio) is one of those terms which, through being too rich in meaning, run the risk of finally having none... If the word “tradition” has suffered the same fate, this has happened all the more easily because even in the language of theology itself this term is sometimes somewhat vague”^[65].

Hegumen Peter (Meshcherinov) in his work “On Holy Tradition” confirms the same idea, “And here we are confronted with an amazing thing. The Church has no dogmatic theological definition, a certain exact formula that is the Holy Tradition. There is no book in the Church entitled “Holy Tradition” in which it would be expounded in individual sections. There is much debate about the Tradition, some believe one thing about the amount of it, others have a different idea; and the content of the Tradition is the matter of religious debates as well; but the Church does not fix exactly what it is”^[66].

It would be significant to emphasize that it is not a “Tradition” itself, but the “Authority” of the Tradition which “lies at the heart of the issues that separate the Eastern Orthodox Church from Roman Catholic and Protestants”^[67]. A modern theologian Donald Fairbairn explains that “Eastern Christianity generally does not raise the issue of authority, at least not in the same way that Western theology does”^[68].

Theological *attributes* of Oral Tradition authority in Eastern Orthodoxy incorporate a diversity of many single details of ecclesiastical life from icons to councils. Nicolas Arseniev suggests, that “The Eastern Church recognizes no formal, juridical authority. For her Christ, the apostles, the Church councils are not “authority”. There is no question here of authority, but of an infinite stream of the life of grace, which has its source in Christ and with which each individual is borne along as a drop or as a ripple”.^[69] Thus, “authority in the Orthodox tradition can best be understood not in legal or external categories, but in relation to the Church’s corporate understanding of reality, all of which participate in divine life”.^[70]

The historical and theological inconsistency of this approach does not take into consideration that Early Proto-Orthodox Church could only survive in numerous battles against pseudo-Christian systems, such as Gnosticism, Arianism, Nestorianism and other heretical challenges primarily by appealing to the unique authority of the Scriptures. Contemporary Orthodox understanding of Tradition authority in past would be a deadly mistake for the Christianity. For that reason, apologist *Tertullian*

^[65] Ouspensky L., Lossky V. Tradition and Traditions / L. Ouspensky, V. Lossky // The Meaning of icons – N.Y.: St Vladimir Seminary Press, 1982. – P. 11.

^[66] Hegumen Meshcherinov P. “On Holy Tradition.” <(http://azbyka.ru/tserkov/o_tserkvi/igumen_Petr_Besedy_o_vere_06-all.shtml)>

^[67] Nassif B. Authority in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition / B. Nassif // By what Authority?: The Vital Questions of Religious Authority in Christianity; ed. by L. Millet Robert – Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2010. – P. 36.

^[68] Fairbairn D. Eastern Orthodoxy through Western Eyes / D. Fairbairn – Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002. – P. 11.

^[69] Arseniev N. Mysticism and the Eastern Church / Nikolas Arseniev, [trans. by Arthur Chambers] – Oxford: Mowbray, 1979. – P. 60.

^[70] Nassif B. Authority in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition in / B. Nassif // By what Authority?: The Vital Questions of Religious Authority in Christianity; ed. by L. Millet Robert – Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2010. – P. 37.

(155–230 A.D.) boldly declared, “But let them believe without the Scriptures, if their object is to believe contrary to the Scriptures”^[71].

If we trace the roots of the authority of Tradition as a personal category back to the Early Church we must mention Augustine, who distinguished two aspects of faith – a personal acceptance and thesis statement of this connection, an act of faith and the content of faith, in its classic definition, which is still used in theology to refer to this bipolarity. He spoke about “*fides qua creditor*” and “*fides quae creditur*” (the faith by which it is believed – personal faith with apprehends... and the faith which is believed – the content of “the faith”). For him faith involves a personal aspect (subjective sense): the belief, the process of faith, the act of faith (faith by which we actually believe, *qua* = ablative) as well as a material aspect (objective sense): the content of faith, the truth of faith, and the statements of faith^[72].

As Karl Barth emphasized it in his book “Church Dogmatic”, “We can establish it only as we stand fast in faith and its knowledge, i.e., as we turn away from ourselves and turn our eyes or rather ears to the Word of God”^[73].

The fact that in Orthodoxy the common people live by “trust faith” (which is commonly believed), without realizing the meaning of this faith, has been sufficiently revealed in the critical comments of many Orthodox authors, which contrasts with the faith of Protestants, who understand both personal and a meaningful aspect of their Christian faith.

As an illustration, we can refer to a statement of K.P. Pobedonostsev, Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod of Orthodox Church (1880-1905), who in his time undertook the dubious role of “Grand Inquisitor” of Russian Baptists, “Our Orthodox clergy teach little and rarely, they serve in the church and *observe ceremonies*. For illiterate people the Bible does not exist. They know only the liturgy and a few prayers, which handed down from parents to children, serve as the only connecting link between the individual and the church. There are some remote areas where people understand absolutely nothing, no words of the church service, or even the prayer “Our Father in Heaven”...”^[74].

If according to A. Kuraev, “Scripture is the norm of faith, and Tradition is a way of life”^[75], then why does not the flesh of oral Tradition fill many suffering and perishing souls with the Word of Scripture?

To some degree, the answer to this question is given by O.A. Sedakova, who studies Tradition as a sphere of practical godliness: “The known property of the practical godliness in the Orthodox tradition, – not just among “simple people” (“godliness of commonality”), but also among quite enlightened people – is that its theological foundation is composed primarily of liturgical texts, which are usually memorized in large numbers, while doctrinal writings of Apostolic Fathers are almost exclusively read by

^[71] Tertullian Q.S. The Prescription Against Heretics, chap. XXIII, as quoted by Cleveland Coxe in Ante-Nicene Fathers. Vol. III, Latin Christianity. N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing Co. 1885, – P. 254.

^[72] Barth K. Church Dogmatics I.1. The Doctrine of the Word of God / K. Barth – N.Y.: T&T Clark International, 2004. – P. 235–237.

^[73] Ibid., 236-237.

^[74] Pobedonostsev K. P. The Great Lie of Our Time / K. P. Pobedonostsev – Moscow: Russian book, 1993. – P. 268–269.

^[75] Kuraev A. “The Heritage of Christ. Secret transmission of the sacraments”, <http://azbyka.ru/hristianstvo/bibliya/novyi_zavet/kuraev_nasledie_christa_08g-all.shtml>

scholars, “professionals”. But, unlike the reasoning, the liturgical theology presupposes the state of engagement for the participant rather than distancing and estimation. What is transmitted and received is not “the meaning” as some particular conceptual content, but the reality of the meaning...”^[76].

Thus, we see a paradox: Tradition that was created to keep and render the exact meaning of the Truth, now in its liturgical expression is rendered in a “meaning-less” way, through the state of engagement, participation and trust and not through the state of acceptance of a certain message. As John Meyendorff noted, “There are Orthodox people who gladly accept the psychological position of the sect, it gives them a certain (false) sense of security and justifies the exotic and unfamiliar parts of the historic Eastern Orthodoxy, which often seem strange ... It frees them from the obligation of listening to others, as well as from the effort required to look at themselves with other people’s eyes”^[77].

In this description we see a root of religious division which applies specifically to the Orthodox Church in the Commonwealth of Independent States. Daniel Clendenin emphasized in his recent book that, “The Orthodox in Russia and Eastern Europe are often more rigid than Orthodox in the Middle East and America, where attitudes are generally more open and flexible”^[78].

The conclusion should come as no surprise to other Christians, that the main difficulty of postmodern Orthodoxy is inability to hear the voice of the rest of the Christian world. “This conservatism is, – in the estimation of catholic researcher of Orthodoxy Adrian Fortescue, – the “most remarkable characteristic” of their tradition”^[79]. Unlike the Orthodox approach, a decision of Catholics “to examine the unique authority of the Catholic church without neglecting the common authority shared by all Christian communions professing the basics of baptism, faith, and canon represents one of the singular achievements of the Second Vatican Council”^[80].

There are many reasons for objective criticism of the fact that Orthodox Tradition has not fulfilled its historical task of finding adequate theological trajectory. There was time when “the Russian Church was quite early seeking a canonical release from the Greek Church. And after the fall of Constantinople, to great shock of Russia, this rejection of Byzantium only got intensified. When John IV said to a papal legate, “Our faith is Christian, but not Greek”, he was right about the description of Russian Church consciousness of that time”^[81].

Being fully aware of its new historical role and potential, Protestantism today is ready to repeat that same phrase addressing itself to Orthodoxy, “Our faith is Christian (Evangelical), but not Orthodox.” We see how the apology of Orthodox Tradition

^[76] Sedakova O. A. Poetics of the rite. The funeral rites of Eastern and Southern Slavs / O. A. Sedakova – Moscow: Indirik, 2004. – P. 282–283.

^[77] Meyendorff J. Doing Theology in an Eastern Orthodox Perspective, P. 94.

^[78] Buber M. Two Types of Faith / M. Buber, [translated by Norman E. Goldhawk] – N.Y.: Harper & Brothers, 1961. – P. 8.

^[79] Adrian Fortescue and Eastern Christian

Churches / A. Dragani – New Jersey: First Gorgias Press LLC, 2007. – P. 51.

^[80] Huff P. A. Authority in the Catholic Tradition, in *By what Authority?: The Vital Questions of Religious Authority in Christianity* / P. A. Huff; ed. by Robert L. Millet – Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2010. – P. 15.

^[81] Zenkovskiy V. V. History of Russian Philosophy / V. V. Zenkovskiy – Leningrad: Ego, 1991. – Vol. 1. – P. 33–34.

becomes a heavy anti-scriptural burden of postmodern Orthodoxy. For if a Protestant systematic theology was formed on the basis of biblical theology, Orthodox theology, not knowing critical Bible studies, simply inherited mystic conceptions of tradition.

Vladimir Solovyov gave the correct definition saying that, “the Orthodox Church is founded on Tradition, but on the Tradition of truth, not lies. Love to the ancestors and the true connection to them does not mean imitating their sins, but making every effort to redeem them with your good deeds. If any tradition is holy, then there is no need for us to preach the Gospel to the gentiles, who stand on their fathers’ tradition. If every tradition is holy, and then let us worship the Pope as well, who holds fast to his antichrist tradition. Truly, bad tradition lies upon the hierarchy of the Russian church...”^[82].

The return to the tradition of the fathers should have a new context for Orthodoxy itself. George Florovsky wrote, “Recovery of the Patristic style is the primary and fundamental postulate for Russia’s theological renaissance. Renaissance does not mean some sort of “restoration’ or some repetition of or return to the past. “Following the Fathers always means moving forward, not backwards; it means fidelity to the patristic spirit and not just to the patristic letter. One must be steeped in the inspiration of the patristic flame and not simply be a gardener pottering around among ancient texts. Unde ardet, inde lucet! (Light is emitted from what burns.) One can follow in the path of the Fathers only through creativity, not through imitation”^[83].

Orthodox Church Tradition in the Approach of Evangelical Theology

Orthodox Church Tradition, as a theological category, is undeniably diverse. It is no longer sufficient for the Orthodox Church to declare adherence to unwritten Tradition without a proper revision of its heritage. The theological discrepancies between Eastern Orthodox and Protestant approaches can be better explained through the critical methods of evangelical theology in order to uncover the historical and objective meaning of Scripture and Tradition in interrelationship.

Our discussion has shown that “the gospel of Jesus Christ is always at risk of distortion. It became distorted in the centuries leading up to the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. This is why Martin Luther said the Gospel must be defended in every generation”.^[84] As a theologian, he saw the core of the problem in the following way, “Our opponents skipped faith altogether and taught human traditions and works not commanded by God but invented by them without and against the Word of God; these they have not only put on a par with the Word of God but have raised far above it”^[85].

Philipp Melancthon, and later John Wesley, introduced a revised concept of “adiaphora” (“things indifferent”) to distinguish between the essentials of Christianity and, on the other hand, matters which Scripture neither commands nor forbids, neutral

^[82] Solovyov V. S. *Collected Works / V. S. Solovyov* – Moscow: Logos, 1992 (reprinted). – Vol. 3. – P. 239.

^[83] Florovsky G. *Collected Works / G. Florovsky*; [trans. by Robert L. Nichols] – Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1987. – Vol. II. – P. 294.

^[84] Sproul R. C. *Are we together? A protestant*

Analyzes Roman Catholicism / R. C. Sproul – Ann Arbor, Michigan: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2012. – P. 1.

^[85] Luther M. *Lectures on Galatians / Martin Luther // Luther’s Works: in 56 vols.* – St. Louis: Concordia, 1958-74. – Vol. 26. – P. 52.

issues to be decided by each local church as long as they do not impede or obscure the gospel.^[86] In addition to that, John Wesley insisted that “sola scriptura” is to be interpreted as “primarily” rather than “solely” or “exclusively”^[87].

In traditional Protestant theology the Bible is the source of revealed truth, and the Spirit is the instrument by which this truth is known^[88]. Revelation of the Bible is “fully divine in its origin, and yet it comes to us by means of fully human agents”^[89]. J. Woodbridge suggests that “The Bible does contain “errors”; nevertheless it gives faithful, or “infallible”, perspective on salvation”^[90].

For the mainstream of Protestant theology, “Holy Scriptures has preeminent status as the word of God, committed to writing in an unalterable manner. There are no historically verifiable apostolic traditions that are not attested in some way by Scripture”^[91]. Tradition is not “the art of passing on the Gospel”^[92] but rather “the gift of remaining true to the gospel through continued struggle against the power of sin, death and the devil”^[93].

Among contemporary Evangelical theologians who focused in greater depth on the origin, content and theological developments of Eastern Orthodox Church Tradition, we can name D. Bloesch, G. Bray, D. Clendenin, K. Hill, D. Fairbairn, R. Morey, A. Negrov, P. Negrut, M. Noll, J. Stamooolis, T. Oden, R. Olson, G. Osborne, M. Volf. Their main theological trend regarding the Orthodox Church Tradition was to reveal the true meaning of the phenomenon in relation to the predominant expression of the tradition in Eastern Orthodoxy as well as to set forth new theology, principles and methods of interpretation of this religious Tradition as a part of a coherent and meaningful whole.

Because the Bible is the main authoritative source for theology, the neo-evangelical approach represented by K. Barth, H. Ockenzoza, F. Turretin, C. Hodge, B. Warfield, C. Henry and J. Woodbridge interprets the Bible primarily as a personal revelation from God, emphasizing verbal inspiration, biblical inerrancy and a literalistic hermeneutic. Karl Barth expressed well this approach, stating that, “Scripture is in the hands but not in the power of the church”^[94].

Another group of evangelical scholars (S. Grenz, D. Bonhoeffer, L. Boettner, T. Buchan, B. McCormack, D. Dayton) is engaged in what Grenz calls the “theological history of the evangelical trajectory”. They tend to see the Bible as a final “norming norm”^[95]. According to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “The norm of the Word of God in

^[86] Thorsen D. A. *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral* / D. A. Thorsen – Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990. – P. 159–162.

^[87] Williams D. H. *Evangelicals and Tradition: The Formative Influence of the Early Church* / D. H. Williams – Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005. – P. 97.

^[88] Bloesch 1994, P. 19.

^[89] *Evangelicals Scripture. Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics* / ed. by V. Bacote – Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004. – P. 7.

^[90] Woodbridge J. D. *Biblical Authority. A critique of the Roger. McKim Proposal* / J. D. Woodbridge – GR, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982. – P. 14.

^[91] *Scripture and Tradition. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IX* / ed. by Skillrud H. C., Stafford J. F., Martensen D. F. – Augsburg, Minneapolis, 1995. – P. 49.

^[92] Tavad H. G. *Holy Writ or Holy Church* / H. G. Tavad – New York: Harper & Bros., 1959. – P. 1.

^[93] Bloesch 1994, P. 160.

^[94] Barth K. *Church Dogmatics I.1. The Doctrine of the Word of God* / K. Barth – N.Y.: T&T Clark International, 2004. – P. 682.

^[95] *Evangelicals and Scripture. Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics* / ed. by V. Bacote – Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2004. – P. 8.

Scripture is the the Word of God itself, and what we possess, reason, conscience, experience, are the materials to which this norm seeks to be applied”^[96].

A range of theological viewpoints is presented within the Evangelical approach concerning Eastern Orthodox Tradition. Some theologians (e.g., D. Clendenin, D. Fairbairn, T. Oden, R. Olson) hold a generally positive view of Orthodox tradition, which is “not a set of authoritative texts, but a life that sustains and guides the sacramental organism called the Church”^[97], while other evangelical scholars criticize Orthodox Church tradition for: (1) the unclear differentiation between historical and normative authority of the Scripture (Bloesch, 1994), (2) being a “mixture of questionable mysticism with somewhat strange philosophy” (Nichols 1995), (3) a redundant exaltation of traditionalism and patristic theology (Houdmann, 2009), (4) hermeneutical misinterpretations and neglect of critical biblical studies (Negrov, 2008), (5) blending apostolic and ecclesiastical forms of tradition (Negrut, 1998), (6) isolation tendency and absence from recent theological developments (Morey, 2008), and (7) conservatism and a static understanding of the concept of Orthodox tradition (Dulles, 2006)^[98].

The ongoing inter-denominational discussion on the research issue reveals that, “despite triumphalistic claims of Orthodox apologists that they embody the true apostolic faith, in reality there is a cluster of conflicting traditions, theologies, and ecclesiastical structures”^[99].

Protestants may disagree on details, but the main principle remains the same, “Scripture constitutes the written standard of sacred revelation, but tradition – broadly expressed in liturgy, creed, preaching, polity, and interpretation – serves as scripture’s divinely ordained natural context, apart from which the text can be neither efficacious nor comprehensible”^[100].

Lorraine Boettner summarizes the Protestant viewpoint in this way:

“We do not reject all tradition, but rather make judicious use of it in so far as it accords with Scripture and is founded on truth. We should, for instance, treat with respect and study with care the confessions and council pronouncements... But we do not give any church the right to formulate new doctrine or make decisions contrary to the teaching of Scripture. Protestants keep these standards strictly subordinate to Scripture, and in that they are ever ready to re-examine them for that purpose. In other words, they

^[96] Bonhoeffer D. *No Rusty Swords* / D. Bonhoeffer – trans. Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden – N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1965. – P. 314

^[97] Fairbairn 2002, P. 33.

^[98] Bloesch G. D. *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration & Interpretation* / G. Donald Bloesch – Downer Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1994; Nichols A. *Light from the East: Authors and Themes in Orthodox Theology* / A. Nichols – London, 1995. – P. 96; Houdmann S. *Got questions: Bible questions answered.* / S. Houdmann – Enumclaw WA: Pleasant Word, 2009; Negrov A. *Biblical interpretation in the Russian Orthodox Church* / A. Negrov – Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2008; Negrut P. *Searching for the*

True Apostolic Church: What Evangelicals Should Know About Eastern Orthodoxy / P. Negrut // *Christian Research Journal* – vol. 20. – No. 3, Jan- March 1998; Morey R. *Is Eastern Orthodoxy Christian?* / R. Morey – Millerstown, P.A.: Christian Scholars Press, 2008; Dulles A. *The Orthodox Imperative* // *First Things*. 2006. August/September. P. 31-5.

^[99] Negrut 1998, P.12.

^[100] Huff P. *Authority in the Catholic Tradition, in By what Authority?: By what Authority?: The Vital Questions of Religious Authority in Christianity* / P. Huff – ed. by Robert L. Millet – Mercer Macon: University Press, 2010. – P. 5.

insist that in the life of the church Scripture is primary and the denominational standards are subordinate or secondary. Thus they use their traditions with one controlling caution: they continually ask if this or that aspect of their belief and practice is true to the Bible. They subject every statement of tradition to that test, and they are willing to change any element that fails to meet that test”^[101].

The theological controversy, presented here in the researched field of Orthodox Church Tradition authority, identifies some critical issues (historical, hermeneutical, ecclesial, Christological, and theological misconceptions in Eastern Orthodoxy), which require further analysis. Unfortunately, Biblical studies of Orthodox Church tradition authority represent the weakest area in modern Orthodox theology.

The notion of “true apostolic paradosis” (unwritten Tradition) in Orthodox theology is too dependant on many political, cultural and national conditions or ideas, which are not directly related to contemporary challenges as well as to the theological incongruity of Orthodox Church Tradition as a quasi-canonical institution. Orthodox theologian John Meyendorff exclaims on the issue, “How many traditions of the latter kind the Orthodox must abandon before they can persuade other Christians to accept their claim to possess the one true Tradition!”^[102].

The holistic approach to the Scripture and Tradition dispute is also related to the basic conviction that theological pluralism of evangelicals has to discover a new dimension of Orthodox Church Tradition as a potential resource for better understanding their own Christian heritage. At the same time, the Orthodox Church needs to realise that the Christian faith is always older and bigger than any denominational claim on it. A balanced approach can be found in the experience of the Early Church, kerygma and liturgy which had no tension between the Gospel as revelation and the Gospel as tradition.

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