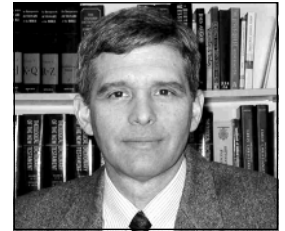


The Matrix of the New Covenant for Contextualizing the Gospel Among the Slavic Peoples

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The specific concern of this essay is the question of the effective means of bringing the gospel of the new covenant in Jesus Christ to the Slavic peoples. As this question touches the chief task of the church in history,¹ there is no lack of proposals for effectively executing that task in this part of the world with its own context of cultural «Orthodoxy.» Some of those proposals call upon Protestant churches to look more «Orthodox» in worship style, including the adoption of liturgies, church architecture, artwork, etc. In this essay I will contend that all proposed means of finding contact with the surrounding culture, including those more «Orthodox,» must first be submitted to the criteria of the new covenant, which is the Church of Jesus Christ's defining charter. Means of touching the secular culture that contradict or mute the essential nature of the new covenant rob the church of the ability to minister according to her very nature, which means robbing her of the most effective ministry possible to the world. The first part of this essay will examine the major provisions of the new covenant that make the



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¹ Broadly considered, evangelism is the church's primary means of bringing glory to God *in history*. Other functions of the church, such as worship and fellowship for mutual edification of members, are both means to the end that the church be equipped to do that for which God has left her *on earth in history*.

church of Jesus Christ what it is. In the second part I will attempt some application of new covenant principles to the question of the contextualization of the gospel for the Slavic peoples.

1. THE ESSENTIAL PROVISIONS OF THE NEW COVENANT

1.1. Grace Unbounded—the Forgiveness of Sins

That God would mercifully forgive his people's wickedness and remember their sins no more (Jer 31:34; cf. 33:8 and 50:20) is the basis upon which all of the other provisions of the new covenant are to be realized.² Whereas Israel had always been the special object of Yahweh's grace,³ and whereas the divine *hesed* had made provision for some experience of forgiveness within the sacrificial system (Lev 4:20.26; 1Ki 8:30; cf. Ps 32:1.5; 51:7; 86:5; 103:3), the NT nevertheless considers the problem of sin ultimately unresolved under the old covenant. The incessant repetition of the sacrifices and the limited access to God stipulated in the temple cult were constant reminders that Israel's sin was being merely «passed over» and not removed. A new outpouring of Yahweh's mercy under the new covenant would provide a solution to the sin problem once for all. In Jesus Christ the New Testament writers see a completely unmerited and once-for-all worthy sacrifice that at once purified the conscience of the believer (Heb 9:14; 10:2.22) and made the temple cult utterly obsolete as the means of approach to God (Heb 8-10). Though Yahweh's grace to Israel had been great indeed in his sovereign free choice to love Israel, and in his steady faithfulness despite Israel's steady whoredom with other gods, by comparison with the measure of grace given under the new covenant, the apostle John could only see Moses as the

² Oehler notes in this regard, that the abolition of the old condemnation by divine mercy is the fundamental assumption in this new dispensation (Gustav Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament*, rpt. of 1873 ed. [Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978], 458; cf. also Edward McComiskey, *The Covenants of Promise* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985], 87).

³ As Snaith notes, grace (Heb. *dsh*) was not a virtue among other virtues, or even at the top of the scale of virtues, but rather the fundamental relationship on which the whole structure of Israelite society and religion rested (Norman H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* [London: Epworth, 1944], 94-130).

bringer of «law,» while Jesus brought a completely new era of “grace and truth” (Jn 1:17).

1.2. A New Spirit, a New Heart, and a New Obedience

Upon the gracious provision for the complete forgiveness of sins rests what OT scholar Walther Eichrodt has called the «central miracle of the new age»⁴ — the new covenant promise of a new outpouring of God’s own Spirit in the creation (Is 42:1; 44:3; Jer 31:33; Eze 11:19; 36:26-27; 39:29; Joel 2:28). Toward his people, the ministry of God’s Spirit under the new covenant would attain a new penetration and depth in the individual believer. Under Moses the Spirit’s ministry was largely, although not exclusively, experienced as external to the individual, and at a national level through anointed kings, prophets, and judges, with the purpose of establishing and separating out a chosen people from among all other nations who did not know Yahweh.⁵ In the new era, according to the prophetic word, the ministry of Yahweh’s Spirit reaches and transforms the very heart of Yahweh’s people.

In biblical anthropology the heart is the wellspring of all human life with special focus on the mind and will, but not ignoring the emotions.⁶ The new heart created by the Spirit is one of flesh (Eze 36:26) that is soft and responsive, rather than one of stone that is unresponsive. God’s law written on the responsive heart means that it will be part of the mind and will of his people. The new Spirit will energize the heart’s new direction so that it will willingly obey God’s righteous law in holiness of life.

A changed heart is another significant indication of both the measure and need of divine grace in the new covenant. The context of national rebellion and hardness of heart surrounding Jeremiah as he prophesied (3:17; 5:23; 7:24; 11:8;

⁴ Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) 2:59.

⁵ See further Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2:60 ff. In light of passages like Ps 51:9-11 and 144:10 it is probably best to see with Eichrodt (*Theology of the Old Testament*, 2:62-63) that the Spirit provided some minimal level of guidance and enabling directly to the individual to live under the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant.

⁶ On the heart in biblical anthropology see John Laidlaw, *The Bible Doctrine of Man* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1879), 86-89, and Hans Walter Wolf, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 40-58.

18:12; cf. 4:14; 17:9; 22:17) had been predicted by Moses in Deuteronomy and there promises were made that God would himself circumcise the heart of his people (Dt 30:6). Yahweh had earlier commanded the people to circumcise their own hearts (Dt 10:16; Jer 4:4; 9:25), but they could not. In their failure, God graciously changes their hearts himself. This was the first time that God promised to change the heart of his whole people as part of a new and unconditional scheme of salvation.⁷

⁷ Thomas M. Raitt, *A Theology of Exile* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 177; cited by Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 116.

⁸ Other NT terminology for the new birth includes believers being «born of the Spirit» (Gal 4:29), with a «spiritual resurrection» (Ro 6:13); and having a «sonship from God» (Gal 4:7; Ro 8:15).

⁹ Regarding the old covenant, Oehler states, «a penetration of the human spirit by the Holy Spirit is not reached in the Old Testament, but only a working on the human mind» (Oehler, *Old Testament Theology*, 142). Buchsel adds that while conversion as a moral change was reached under the old covenant, regeneration as a new creation was still only the hope of the OT believer, not his experience (Buchsel, «anagennaw,» *TDNT*, ed. G. Kittel [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964], 1:6743).

¹⁰ Terrence E. Fretheim, «[dy,» *NIDOTTE*, ed. W. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 2:413.

The NT presents the new covenant promises of the Spirit towards the individual in terms of regeneration and of being born again as a new creation with a new nature (Jn 3:5-6; 2Co 5:17)⁸ —none of which were the believer's experience under the old covenant.⁹ The indwelling Spirit is God's own gracious provision for the righteousness that leads to salvation (Ro 8:4; Gal 5:16).

1.3. A new knowledge of God

When Yahweh promised that his people would «know him» (Jer 31:34) under the new covenant, another critical difference between the old and new was established. The knowledge of Yahweh in Israel had always been understood as a personal, covenant relationship between God and his people with characteristics of love, trust, respect and open communication.¹⁰ Yet the knowledge of God that Israel had in her covenant with Yahweh was still inferior to the coming relationship promised by the prophets. Three features of Israel's situation are relevant to this point. First, with the sin that was merely passed over under the old covenant, the holiness of God dominates Israel's picture of him. Yahweh's holiness radically separates him from his sinful people creating a dynamic that colored the whole of Israel's relationship with him. Theologian James Packer's comments are apt at this point:

The whole spirit of Old Testament religion was determined by the thought of God's holiness. The constant emphasis was that man, because of his weakness as a creature and his defilement as a sinful creature, must learn to humble himself and be reverent before God. Religion was «the fear of the Lord» – a matter of knowing your own littleness, of confessing your faults and abasing yourself in God's presence, of sheltering thankfully under His promises of mercy, and of taking care above all things to avoid presumptuous sins. Again and again it was stressed that man must keep his place, and his distance, in the presence of a holy God. This emphasis overshadowed everything else.¹¹

¹¹ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 183.

The second feature limiting Israel's relationship with Yahweh is the temple cult itself where the «distance» between the holy God Yahweh and his people was formally defined and enforced. While Yahweh would be present among his people (Ex 29:42-46), the relationship was not that of a direct encounter, but of one mediated in three ways. The tabernacle/temple itself mediated the place of encounter - the ordinary Israelite being able to meet his God only at the entrance curtain of the tabernacle, and then only if the sacrificial ordinances stipulated by God were perfectly fulfilled. The priesthood was a mediating class acting on behalf of the people and engaging most fully with God, but once a year on the Day of Atonement. The sacrificial system graciously mediated the sins of the people.¹²

¹² On the mediation in the temple cult in these three areas see David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 30-45.

The third and final limitation on the nature of Israel's knowledge of God was its national character. The national and collective (versus the individual) nature of the blessings and curses of the cult served to mute the direct and personal nature of Yahweh's lovingkindness toward the believer. As E. Jacob notes, «there is a tension between [Yahweh's] holiness and love in the OT, ...

¹³ E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Eng. Trans, 1955), 110-112; cited by Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1981), 77, n. 5.

¹⁴ J. Schneider, «God,» *TDNTT*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 2:71.

¹⁵ Douglas D. Webster, *A Passion for Christ: An Evangelical Christology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 89.

¹⁶ Packer, *Knowing God*, 214. With Barr, and against Jeremias, it is probably best not to make «Abba» more familiar or intimate than necessary in the believer's relationship with the heavenly Father. See James Barr, «Abba isn't 'Daddy,»» *Journal of Theological Studies* 39 (April, 1988): 28-47; and Joachim Jeremias, *Bogoslovie novogo zaveta*, part 1, tr. from German [Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura, 1999], 81-87).

God's love has a different tone in the OT than the NT because it is addressed in a general way to the people as a nation.»¹³

The revelation of God as Father in the NT stands in sharp contrast to the relationship Israel had with Yahweh. Yahweh's fatherhood was indeed known under the old covenant (Ex 4:22-23; Dt 32:6; Isa 63:16; Jer 31:9; Hos 11:1), but it is only with the ministry of Jesus Christ that this OT picture of God is fully experienced by his people.¹⁴ In the Incarnation, Jesus not only modeled a personal relationship with his «Abba-Father» intended for all humanity,¹⁵ but his resolution of the sin problem in his sacrifice enabled God's people to finally draw near into the Holy of Holies (Heb 6:19-20; 9:1-14). As the incomparable Son of the Father he baptizes his own with the Spirit by which they, too, call from their innermost being, «Abba, Father» (Ro 8:15; Gal 4:6). Certainly as Packer suggests «Father» is the distinctly Christian name for God.¹⁶

1.4. Blessing to All Peoples

Finally, the spiritual blessings that lie at the center of the new covenant are also associated with material blessings. All of the blessings foretold by Israel's prophets (gathering of the people to the land: Jer 31:8-11; 32:15.37.41; rebuilding cities: Jer 30:18; 31:38-40; cultivation and productivity of the land: Jer 31:5.12-14; increase in herds and flocks: Jer 33:12-13; population explosion: Jer 30:20; 31:17; resulting in expression of joy: Jer 31:4.7.13; 33:11; and a state of blessing rest, and peace: Jer 31:23-25.27-28; 32:42-44; 33:6; even resurrection and everlasting life: Eze 37:1-23, esp. 37:12 and 37:26) point to a literal restoration of the Jewish nation at some future time under the new covenant. The spiritual renewal of Israel is a special means of God's salvation going to all

nations (Eze 20:41; 28:25; 36:22-23.36; 37:28; Isa 45:14; 49:26). In the NT Jesus' and the disciples' announcement of the Kingdom of God preserves this distinctly physical and Jewish hope of the new covenant (cf. e.g., Mt 19:28 and Ac 3:18-20),¹⁷ and extends salvation to all peoples (Mt 21:43; cf. Ac 8:12; 20:24-25; 28:31; Ro 14:17).¹⁸

2. THE NEW COVENANT PROMISES IN ISSUES OF CONTEXTUALIZATION FOR THE SLAVIC PEOPLES

As we seek now to apply the new covenant matrix to the church's mission in the Slavic world, it is important that we make note of three matters. First, the new covenant is a trans-cultural covenant, which means that the essence of the church is a trans-cultural identity. Forgiveness of sins, the outpouring of God's Spirit, the new birth and changed heart are all trans-cultural entities founded together on the person of the Lord Jesus, the Master of all tribes, all peoples, and all tongues (Rev 5:9-10; Gal 3:28). Thus, adherence to the matrix of the new covenant is of utmost importance for the church's *orthodoxis*, her self-understanding, if she is not to be compromised or completely subsumed as she enters and exists in human cultures. Church history is sadly full of such examples, particularly when the church has been nationalized as full partner of the state.

Second, the church's ministry in culture, her *orthopraxis*, must be conducted according to her new covenant charter, not according to the dictates of a given human culture. True, at a methodological level it is necessary to be sensitive to a culture so as to speak to it, but care must be taken that a particular method or technique of addressing a culture does not deny or mute the new covenant identity of the church. When the church enters a culture, she must be keenly aware

¹⁷ On both the physical and spiritual aspects of the Kingdom that Jesus preached see my *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (Dallas: Word, 1997), ch. 9.

¹⁸ Jesus' rejection by Israel brings the divine verdict that the Kingdom for a time is taken from Israel and given to another «nation,» that will bring forth its fruit (Mt 21:43). In Acts the apostolic preaching of Jesus as the Christ (Ac 5:42) to Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles is summarized at several points as preaching «the kingdom» (Ac 8:12; 20:24-25; 28:31). In Ac 20:24-25 the parallel of the gospel of grace (v. 24) and the preaching of the kingdom (v. 25) particularly shows the apostolic mind that the Kingdom of God is directly related to the gospel the church preached. Finally, Paul's statement in Ro 14:17 that the Kingdom is «righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit» places the locus of the Kingdom's presence now in the work of the Holy Spirit in regenerating and sanctifying a people for himself. See Saucy, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, 339-348.

of the resources that are uniquely at her disposal *as the new covenant church*. Ministry in the world that is grounded in identity is powerful. Such is the ministry presented to us by the church of the NT as it entered and existed in the cultures of the ancient Mediterranean world. Ministry from anything less than identity denies the church's essence and robs her of the divinely intended means and power for ministry.

Finally, a note about the Orthodox Church in this application. It would be a tired commonplace to labor to demonstrate that Slavic culture is to a great degree informed by the Eastern Orthodox Church. Inner attitudes, social values, and standards of legitimacy in our context are very often Orthodox attitudes, values, and standards, especially when notions of «church» or «religion» come up. Behind this cultural-religious complex, or ethos, lies the dogma of the Orthodox Church, whether explicitly or implicitly. Thus, my analysis of how the new covenant interfaces with this culture's values and attitudes will invariably touch areas of Orthodox dogma that fund those attitudes and values, which, in my view, also are at variance with the assertions of the new covenant. However, a theological polemic at the level of dogma is beyond the purview of this essay and must wait for another time.

2.1. Patterns of worship

How God is worshiped has direct correlation to fundamental theological assertions about God and the worshippers' perceived relation to him. For this reason, worship forms of the old covenant — or as one has said, «the religion of Moses,»¹⁹ need to be examined as to their suitability for the church of the new covenant. Patterns of worship must not mute or contradict the new nature of the people of God. This is an important point from which to begin for the Orthodox ethos of the

¹⁹ The terminology «religion of Moses» comes from Franz J. Leenhardt (*Two Biblical Faiths: Protestant and Catholic* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962]). In his attempt to analyze the driving motifs and ethos of Catholicism and Protestantism, he identified motifs characteristic of either a religion of Moses (Catholicism) or a religion of Abraham (Protestantism).

Slavic culture, because the Orthodox Church proudly acclaims its heritage as the New Israel, which took its basic liturgical form of worship from the liturgical form of old covenant Israel.²⁰ As for specific forms of worship, I believe the new covenant criteria make at least three recommendations.

First, a universal, Spirit-indwelled and born-again priesthood argues against any form of clergy/laity dichotomy in the worship of the church. In the high priesthood of Jesus Christ, the mediating function of the Aaronic priesthood achieves its goal. The new covenant people of God worship as a body with direct access to the Father through Jesus Christ. A «priesthood» or clergy that is understood to have unique access to God, or is «closer to God» than the average believer in Jesus reflects the religion of Moses and mutes the superiority of the new covenant on this point. This observation also has implications for the understanding of ordination for the new covenant church. Ordination that bequeaths a spiritual gift, authority, or power to a mediating class within the church is incommensurate with the church's new nature.

Second, the new covenant demands a balanced expression of the transcendence of Holy God and the immanence of Father God in the church's worship. Worship that is led, for example, exclusively by a specially-ordained class that performs liturgical «mysteries» removed from the average believer by liturgical «fences» decidedly emphasizes the unapproachable holiness of God at the expense of his nearness and fatherhood. Lest we rush to condemn others with a formal priestly class in the church, we Protestants need to remember that it is a matter of our tradition, and not expressed in NT teaching, that only ordained clergy may administer baptism or the Lord's Supper in the church. In general, the more

²⁰ Clark Carlton, an American Orthodox apologist writes, «The first Christians were Jews, and from the very beginning, they viewed the church as the New Israel. There is no question that Judaism is a liturgical religion. Most Protestants, however, fail to make this liturgical connection between the Old and New Testaments.» He also asserts that the «[early] Church worshipped according to a pattern based upon types set forth in the OT» (Clark Carlton, *The Way: What Every Protestant Should Know About the Orthodox Church* [Salisbury, MA: Regina, 1997], 165 and 155 respectively).

²¹ This is not to deny the liturgical elements reflected in the New Testament documents. Hymns and prayers to Christ, confessions and affirmations of the faith were present in the gatherings of the apostolic church. See Martin Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 78-96.

²² The concept of «defensive holiness» is Klaus Berger's, «Jesus als Pharisäer und Frühe Christen als Pharisäer,» *Novum Testamentum* 30 (1988): 232-262.

²³ On this, see, for example, A. T. Lincoln, «From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical and Theological Perspective,» in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 368-378.

²⁴ See, for example, Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John 1-XII* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), 180; and D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 225.

²⁵ These expressions appear 164 times in Paul's letters. The early Christian understanding of its new identity in Christ is also reflected in the use of Jesus' «name» to describe all of the church's activities. For example, baptism «in Jesus' name» in Acts (2:36; 8:16; 10:48; 19:15), as Jenson observes, is a theological description, not a rubric (Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune Identity* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982], 20, n. 29).

²⁶ The NT never refers to a believer in Christ as «sin-

active the participation of the entire «priesthood» in worship gatherings of the church, the more worship reflects the new covenant nature of the church as the body of Christ dependant upon the mutual ministry of the Spirit-indwelled priesthood. Examples of more active engagement of the members of the body are reflected in Scripture (1Co 14:26), and should be taken as paradigmatic under the new covenant, not merely as indications of a liturgical infancy that would mature through the comprehensive Tradition of the Church.²¹

Third, the inwardness and the fullness of the new covenant grace in the ministry of the Spirit also critique the concept of «holiness» under the religion of Moses, a critique which must be reflected in the church's worship. Although all Israel was a «holy priesthood» (Ex 19:5), the incomplete nature of old covenant grace made for a holiness that was subject to defilement from outside. It was a defensive and fragile holiness.²² It was a holiness that included «holy» people, days, places, and other things also external to the OT saint. All of this changed when Jesus, the inaugurator of the new covenant, made holiness finally a matter of the heart cleansed and renewed by the indwelling Spirit (Mk 7:18-23). Those who are in Christ are themselves holy with Christ's holiness (1Co 1:2) and thus do not observe days and other external commands regarding purity or impurity in their worship (Col 2:20-23).²³

I see at least two further implications for new covenant worship based on the new understanding of holiness. First, the church's worship must be conducted in accord with the believer's exalted position in Christ, for true worship is that which is according to the truth found in Jesus Christ. This is the meaning of Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman in Jn 4:24, that new covenant worship will be worship «in Spirit and truth.»²⁴ That the

believer exists and does all «in Christ,» «in the Lord,» or «in Him,» is the apostle Paul's fundamental anthropological concept of a Christian.²⁵ As it is only in Christ that the heavenly blessings are realized, new covenant worship should strengthen and affirm the believer's understanding of his position before God in Christ. Worshipers must be taught to see themselves as God sees them in Christ, i.e., as fundamentally «saints,» not fundamentally as still «sinners.» This is the posture of the new covenant writings and it is borne out by the fullness of God's grace and the forgiveness given to us in Jesus Christ.²⁶ Certainly, part of this new orientation for the new covenant worshiper is the understanding that he or she has entered a new *state* or *condition* of grace with implications that God, as Scripture asserts (Col 1:14; 2:13), has graciously forgiven all his sins — past, present and future, in Christ.²⁷ Several scholarly studies confirm that the post-apostolic fathers did not fully grasp this aspect of new covenant grace,²⁸ and many of my students demonstrate that evangelicals do not grasp it today.

The second implication is that new covenant worship should focus on expression and strengthening of the inner reality of life in the Spirit and faith. External holy things and practices that convey grace from outside the believer denigrate the inward grace poured out in the Holy Spirit upon the believer justified by faith. Such things and practices reflect the outwardness of the religion of Moses, which the apostle Paul considered a basically immature religion, intended to prepare for the mature life in the new era of grace and the Spirit (Gal 4:24-25).²⁹ N.T. Wright is correct in his observation about the superiority of the new covenant's grace in Jesus Christ when he says that, «where confidence before God is founded upon Christ's work alone, there is no need for sacramentals,

ner,» only «saint.» Even Paul's comment that he «is the foremost of sinners» (1Ti 1:15) is best seen as a reference to his life prior to conversion. See Robert L. Saucy and Neil Anderson, *The Common Made Holy* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1997), 42-43.

²⁷ This is not to eliminate the tension in the present outworking of that forgiveness that includes, for example, the need for a continuous advocacy by Christ for our sins (1Jn 2:1) and our continued confession of sins (1Jn 1:9). Rather, it is to call us to a clear recognition of the state of grace the believer has in Christ so that future unrepented sins, while they do make the believer a «child under wrath,» no longer threaten him to again become a «child of wrath,» as the Reformer, Francis Turretin noted (Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger [Phillipsburg: P & R, 1994], 2:665-666).

²⁸ T. F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1948); Campbell N. Moody, *The Mind of the Early Converts* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1920); and Kenneth E. Kirk, *The Vision of God: The Christian Doctrine of the Summum Bonum* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1934).

²⁹ Leenhardt draws the distinction between the outer signs associated with Moses' communion with God and the «inner word» that characterized Abraham's (Leenhardt, *Two Biblical Faiths*, 35).

³⁰ N.T. Wright, «Justification: The Biblical Basis and Its Relevance for Contemporary Evangelicalism,» in *The Great Acquittal: Justification by Faith and Current Christian Thought*, ed. G. Reid, 13-17 [London: Collins, 1982], 31-32.

devotion to Mary, rote prayers, and sacramentalism in general.»³⁰

2.2. Proces of worship

Another value deeply imbedded in the Slavic soul from its Orthodox history concerns the proper place of worship. An open letter written by a deacon of Hope Baptist Church in Moscow two years ago, and known to many Westerners, states the case for the importance of Russian evangelicals having their own «temples» thus:

The religious mentality of the Russian people is for the most part conditioned by Russian Orthodoxy. For the latter the word «church» is primarily, if not exclusively, associated with a building. In addition, people have retained the pagan notion that a deity is associated with a concrete place where he resides. So a basic reason for constructing a facility is to meet the people's expectation of the church as the Lord's house. Their understanding of the church as the congregation of believers will occur only after they have become a part of it, and for this to happen they must first come to the «temple,» as they comprehend it. So in our context there is no getting around the need for a «temple.» Building churches in Russia is necessary primarily for unbelievers, not for believers.³¹

³¹ Alexei Markovich, «Do Baptists need Temples?» Summer 2000.

While I certainly appreciate the need of Slavic evangelicals to enjoy the advantages of their own buildings just as their Western counterparts do — and Westerners should not be stingy with their brothers and sisters on this account — the new covenant nature of the church, I think, shows us the potential hazards of justifying our building projects in this way.

There is no doubt that the notion of “church” in the new covenant differs radically from that of the Slavic culture. In Scripture, buildings are specifically

connected with worship only in the religion of Moses, with its need of a temple for the mediation of God's presence and the protection of its antiquated understanding of holiness. Jesus clearly states that worship in the new age of the Spirit is not temple worship (Jn 4:21-24), believers themselves being the temple of the living God (1Co 6:19; 1Pe 2:5). The danger of promoting the existing «Orthodox» understanding about temples is that our forms of evangelizing will support, strengthen, and advertise something that the church fundamentally is not. I confess that I am not as optimistic that those who come to the church under the promotion of one theology will easily embrace a completely different one. My own experience has been that once Baptists erect their own «temples» they continue to think about them just as the Orthodox think about theirs — as something holy in ways believers themselves are not, as God's dwelling, as the Kingdom of God on earth, etc.³² Such thinking is contrary to the new covenant nature of the church.

3.3. Patterns of evangelism

The matrix of the new covenant also addresses the church's strategy and means of evangelism. Missiologists have long noted that whereas the entire NT is, in essence, a book about missions, there is not one mention in the OT of God sending his people across geographical, religious and social barriers to convert other nations.³³ If anything, under the old covenant it is Yahweh himself who is the missionary and his strategy is to bring the nations to worship him in the temple at Jerusalem.³⁴ Such a strategy is suited to the covenantal relationship that existed between Israel and Yahweh. The localization of Yahweh's glory in the Jerusalem temple mediated through the cult required a "come to us" posture toward the world.³⁵

By contrast, the presence of God in the heart of every believer means that the church of the new

³² Orthodox writer John Zizioulas, for example, describes the church's eucharistic celebration as the time when «the Kingdom in its entirety enters into history and is realized here and now» (John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* [Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1985], 155 [emphasis his]). The very architecture of Orthodox temples is purposely patterned after the OT temple, complete with its altar, court, holy place and «Holy of Holies» (*Zakon' Bozhij* [Jordansville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1987], 609-610) and suggests an old covenant understanding of the structure and purpose. See further the comments regarding St. Sofia by Robert Taft, *Vizantijskij tserkovnyj obriad* (St. Petersburg: Aletejia, 2000), 44-45.

³³ On this point see David Bosch, *Preobrazovaniia missionerstva* (St. Petersburg: Bibliia dlia vsekh, 1997), 25, and the studies cited there, which note that even Jonah was not sent to Nineveh to proclaim salvation, but destruction. For a less pessimistic view of Jonah's mission, see Johannes Verkyll, «Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction,» in *Missiologia: biblejskij, istoričeskij, kul'turnyj, strategičeskij aspekty*, eds. A. Chatskij and D. Overton (Moscow: Dukhovnoe vozrozhdenie, 2001), 57-64.

³⁴ Bosch, *Preobrazovanie missionerstva*, 27.

³⁵ William Dyrness notes the limitations for worship in the temple confinement of the glory of Yahweh and the corresponding radical removal of those limitations for

the glory in Christ under the new covenant (William Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1979], 43).

covenant is free of geographical restriction and empowered to go to the world. «Go to them» is the strategy of the new covenant for evangelism, not «bring them to the ‘temple.’» The power of the Holy Spirit which Jesus utilized in loving the world on the world’s territory is the same weapon the church uses in her mission (Jn 20:21). Thus, the evangelistic view of many who simply try various means to get the world to enter the church’s door, including «legitimate» church buildings, is a case of new covenant people using an old covenant tool.

More effective ministry to the culture comes when the church fully utilizes her new covenant identity in Christ’s Spirit, which is self-giving love (Gal 5:22-23). Jesus said that it would be their love that would make his disciples known in the world (Jn 13:35), not their buildings or their «Orthodox» style worship services. It is a significant lesson from the early church for us that despite all the cultural standards of «legitimacy» in the Roman world, it was the Church’s *radical demonstration of love* that conquered the Roman Empire according to Church historian Henry Chadwick:

The practical application of charity was probably the most potent single cause of Christian success. The pagan comment, «See how these Christians love one another» (reported by Tertullian) was not irony. Christian charity expressed itself in care for the poor, for widows and orphans, in visits to brethren in prison or condemned to the living death of labor in the mines, and in social action in time of calamity like famine, earthquake, pestilence, or war.³⁶

In other words, the church gained legitimacy precisely by being the church, not by accommodating the surrounding culture in ways that denied her new covenant nature and new covenant source of power.

³⁶ Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Pelican, 1967), 56. Studies of the history of the Christian diaconate are replete with examples of the early church’s demonstration of radical love. See, for example, Jaap van Klinken, *Diakonia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

CONCLUSION

A deep understanding of the church's identity in the new covenant must fund every way she would be manifest in the world. Worship, fellowship for mutual edification, and evangelism, if they are to maximize the potential for expression of the new era of grace, all must be windows of the new covenant. The particular areas I have chosen for application in this essay are intended only as examples of where I believe the new covenant nature of the church directs us for all aspects of ministry in our «Orthodox» culture. It is a direction that first tells us that the answers to ministry in this context do not lie necessarily in the values and standards of legitimacy derived from either pagan society or the dogmas and forms of the Orthodox Church. Second, it also tells us that cultural standards and values are important to the church's ministry as long as they do not separate the church from her new covenant identity and deny her the power of the Spirit as she goes into the world with radical, self-giving love.

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