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# **Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism: The Status of an Emerging Global Dialogue**

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## **Introduction**

Last November the American Academy of Religion hosted its first Joint Dialogue between the 'Eastern Orthodox Studies Group' and the 'Evangelical Theology Group'. The respondent, Robert Jenson from Princeton University, summarised their relations by declaring, 'I know of no two groups of Christians who pose a greater challenge to ecumenical unity than the dialogue between Eastern Orthodox and Evangelical Christians. It boggles the mind to conceive just how two such different groups can ever bridge their differences. They have both a remarkable unity and remarkable divergences. But as Jesus said, "With God, all things are possible!"'

The purpose of this article is to identify and describe the most important dialogues and scholarly exchanges that have emerged around the world over the past decade between the Eastern Orthodox and Protestant Evangelical traditions. These include the work of academic societies, individual scholars, ecumenical agencies, seminaries, and mission organisations. The previous two hundred years of Orthodox-Evangelical history before 1990, and the increasing number of personal pilgrimages to Orthodoxy by Evangelical believers in recent days, will be touched upon in a general way below, but are too numerous and complex to trace in any detail here. As a result of this survey from 1990 to the present, readers hopefully will be given fresh and vitally important information on a potentially momentous turning point in Orthodox and Evangelical relations in modern church history.

## **Past Relations**

The history of relations between the Eastern Orthodox and Protestant Evangelical traditions has never been written. One does not have to search very far, however, to see that their past relationships have been predominantly characterised by a long negative history of proselytism,

persecution, mutual suspicion, hostility, fear and ignorance. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the Middle East, Orthodox Christians were viewed as objects of conversion during a period of Presbyterian missions to the Arab lands. Thousands of Arab Christians left the Orthodox, Melkite and Syrian Jacobite churches and took up residence in newly founded Presbyterian communities. Less successful were Protestant missions to Russia and Greece. In Russia, prior to the Communist Revolution in 1917, 'Orthodoxy, nationalism, and autocracy' were the Slavic slogans of Orthodox nationalism which socially disadvantaged and oppressed Russian Protestants in the name of 'Holy Russia'. In Greece civil laws were passed outlawing 'proselytism' by Protestant missionaries, the violation of which was punishable by fines and/or imprisonment. Throughout the twentieth century, hundreds of Protestant missionaries suffered sporadic persecution and disgrace under the hands of Greek Orthodox law.

In America, thousands of Orthodox peoples arrived on American shores from Syria, Lebanon, Russia, Greece and parts of Europe during the immigration period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Unlike the national unity some Orthodox once enjoyed in their homelands, America now presented a new external challenge of religious pluralism. During this time the church did not fare well. Second and third generation Orthodox immigrant children haemorrhaged out the doors of the church in large numbers due to the church's apparent irrelevance to their lives and their inability to pray the liturgy in the English language. A number of those parishioners (difficult to quantify) joined Protestant churches after being (re)converted to Christ through Evangelical outreach via the Billy Graham Crusades, Young Life, Campus Crusade for Christ and other parachurch organisations, as well as through the personal witness of individual believers. In some cases, former Orthodox believers became socially ostracised by their families after leaving the church. Such were the general conditions between Orthodox and Evangelical Christians.

### **Emerging Global Dialogue**

In the last ten years a new paradigm of ecumenical relations has begun to emerge between Orthodox and Evangelical Christians on the popular and professional levels. On the popular level, more Evangelicals have begun to join the Orthodox Church in America than ever before. The same has been true to a lesser extent in the UK. Though no formal study has been done to document the exact reasons for these conversions, the growing number of defections has clearly caught the attention of both Orthodox and

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Evangelical leaders. From a cursory survey the most important reasons why Evangelicals are leaving their churches appear to be due to a growing hunger for liturgical worship, a desire for connectedness to historic Christianity and the search for an historic consensus of truth. One source estimates that approximately 80% of the people who are joining the Orthodox Church today come from Evangelical and Charismatic backgrounds such as Campus Crusade for Christ, Young Life, Youth for Christ, Vineyard fellowships, the Evangelical Free Church, Baptist denominations, the Christian and Missionary Alliance and other independent churches. The remaining 20% come from high churches such as Anglicanism, Episcopalianism, Lutheranism, Methodism and Presbyterianism.<sup>1</sup> Millard Erickson, a leading American Evangelical theologian, describes this phenomenon as a small but significant movement that has the potential of greatly impacting the future of Evangelicalism.

An increasing number of persons, especially college students, are turning to denominations emphasising Tradition, historical connection, and liturgy. I have in mind the movement of people like Robert Webber and Walter Dunnett into the Episcopal and Anglican Churches. An even more radical step is the movement of evangelicals into the Eastern Orthodox Church. Peter Gillquist, a major leader in this movement, has described the journey of two thousand evangelical Protestants toward Eastern Orthodoxy. One issue of his magazine *Again* featured the testimonies of recent evangelical converts to Eastern Orthodoxy. Among the more conspicuous is Franky Schaeffer, son of the late Francis Schaeffer. A few, such as Thomas Howard; have even been attracted to Roman Catholicism.

This movement is small, but it is real and of potentially great influence because it includes young people who could be the leaders of the evangelical movement in the years ahead. Unless mainstream evangelicalism finds ways to meet the needs of young people desiring some tie with the historic faith and with more formal worship, more of them will leave for denominations that offer real alternatives to popular experience-centred worship.<sup>2</sup>

Erickson's reference to Peter Gillquist describes the former Campus Crusade for Christ leader who led approximately 1700 followers into the

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<sup>1</sup> Telephone conversation with Peter Gillquist, Chairman of the Department of Missions and Evangelism, Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America (July, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Millard Erickson, *Where is Theology Going?* (Grand Rapids, 1994), pp. 41-2.

Antiochian Orthodox Church in 1987.<sup>3</sup> The remaining 500 of his followers broke ranks with the group and remained a separate denomination called 'The Evangelical Orthodox Church'. A few years later, Franky Schaeffer, son of the late Francis Schaeffer, joined the Greek Orthodox Church. Though Gillquist and Schaeffer are quite serious in their call for discipleship,<sup>4</sup> by their own admission neither possesses a substantial theological education as reflected in their educational histories and have often oversimplified interpretations of church history and theology. It is also worth noting that in the UK, Michael Harper recently converted to Orthodoxy in response to the doctrinal erosion of the Anglican Church.<sup>5</sup>

Alongside these popular trends, there are a variety of professional forums through which Evangelicals and Orthodox have begun to engage each other over the past decade. Most are aimed at establishing friendly relations with each other. A few have engaged in substantive discussions of theology. In the following paragraphs I will attempt to document and assess the work of academic societies and mission organisations, individual scholars, seminaries and universities. In so doing, I am certain that I will have left out important people and projects due to the weaknesses of my own limitations. What follows is my best effort to locate all the major players, insofar as I am able to see them.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Evangelical Denomination Gains Official Acceptance into the Orthodox Church', *Christianity Today* 31 (February 6, 1987), p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> See Peter Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox: A Journey to the Ancient Christian Faith* (Brentwood, TN, 1989); Frank Schaeffer, *Dancing Alone: The Quest for Orthodox Faith in the Age of False Religion* (Brookline, MA, 1994). However, Father Eusebius Stephanou, a reform-minded cradle Orthodox who has been promoting evangelical renewal since long before Gillquist entered the church, has criticised Gillquist and Schaeffer for preaching Orthodoxy rather than Christ, viewing 'everything in the Orthodox Church through rose-colored glasses'. 'Converts to Orthodoxy: A Grave Concern', *The Logos* 25 (Nov/Dec, 1992): 1-2, 4. A historical evaluation of Gillquist and his followers' move into the Antiochian Orthodox Church in 1987 has been done by Timothy Weber, 'Looking for Home: Evangelical Orthodoxy and the search for the Original Church', in *New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*, ed. Bradley Nassif, foreword by Henry Chadwick (Grand Rapids, 1996), pp. 95-121. Gillquist's criticism of the way the Greek Archdiocese handled his group's trip to Constantinople (Weber, p. 113) should be balanced by the oral history of Fr Gregory Wingenbach, a priest of the Greek Archdiocese who oversaw their visit.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Harper, *A Faith Fulfilled* (Ben Lomond, CA, 1998).

### Academic Societies and Mission Organisations

Over the past decade there have been three leading organisations that have been working on Orthodox-Evangelical dialogue from different angles. There are no formal relations between the organisations since each was formed with its own purpose independently from the others. At times, however, each *de facto* compliments or overlaps the work of the others. As a primary focus the first organization deals with theological subjects, the second with church life, and the third with attitudes and practical relationships between the two groups. In addition to these organisations, I will also comment on situational dialogues that have been created for only a limited duration and purpose, as well as the work in Romania where the second largest population of Orthodox reside.

The most serious and sustained effort to understand the areas of theological convergence and divergence between the Orthodox and Evangelical traditions that is being undertaken today comes from the *Society for the Study of Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism* (SSEOE), possibly soon to be renamed the *Institute for the Study of Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism* pending funding. This is a learned group that was founded in the United States in 1990 by the present author along with six other Orthodox and Evangelical scholars. All had personal experience and academic training in both traditions in varying degrees. Through its annual meetings and unpublished papers,<sup>6</sup> the SSEOE seeks to make the two traditions known and understood in relation to each other's history, doctrine, worship and spirituality. It thus serves both the academy and the church. Until 1999, the organization met annually at the Billy Graham Centre on the campus of Wheaton College, and now meets in different regions of the United States. Past themes of the annual meetings have been: 'Proselytism or Conversion? An Orthodox and Evangelical Exchange' (1991), 'Scripture, Tradition and Authority' (1992), 'Salvation by Grace' (1993), 'The Kingdom of God and the Role of the Church in Salvation' (1994), 'The Role of Theology in the Spiritual Life' (1995), and "'Outside the Church There is No Salvation": An Orthodox and Evangelical Exchange' (1999). Keynote speakers from North America have included, among others, Orthodox theologians Stanley Harakas, Leonid Kishkovsky, Theodore Stylianopoulos, Emmanuel Clapsis, George Liacopoulos, Michael Prokurat and Edward Rommen; Evangelical theologians have been J.I. Packer, Thomas Oden, Gerald Bray, Donald Bloesch, Grant Osborne, James Stamoolis, Kent Hill, Thomas Finger,

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<sup>6</sup> The papers are now being edited for possible publication in the next few years.

Harold O.J. Brown, Craig Blaising and Dale Allison. The format consists of a single annual theme that is addressed by two keynote speakers from each side, followed by audience participation and a summary of the conclusions that have been reached at the end of the conference.

The purpose of the SSEOE is not to convert people from one side to the other, though most members would view theological conversion as a legitimate consequence of the dialogue. Its main purpose is to enrich participants by removing false barriers which have divided them while also identifying continuing differences. In the words of the Constitution, the SSEOE seeks 'to promote fellowship and mutual enrichment among scholars engaged in these activities, and to co-ordinate the work of such theologians in North America and abroad'. Membership includes a wide cross-section of Evangelical denominations and Orthodox jurisdictions. Institutions represented by students and faculty include Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (IL), Wheaton College, Eastern Nazarene College, Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Southern Baptist Seminary (KY), Dallas Seminary, Fuller Seminary, St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Seminary, and others. Evangelical and Orthodox endorsements of the SSEOE have been conferred by Kenneth Kantzer, J.I. Packer, Ward Gasque, Kent Hill, Bill Bright, Bishop Kallistos (Timothy) Ware, Father Stanley Harakas, the late Father John Meyendorff and Metropolitan Philip Saliba of the Antiochian Orthodox Church of North America.<sup>7</sup>

The second organization that is dedicated to Orthodox-Evangelical dialogue is *Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding* (EMEU) based at North Park University in Chicago, Illinois. According to its mission statement, 'Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding is an informal fellowship of North American Evangelical Christians committed to dialogue which seeks mutual understanding, respect and friendship between Middle Eastern and Western Christians.'<sup>8</sup> Much of their work seeks to raise the level of consciousness among Evangelicals of North America and to foster a sense of solidarity with Arab Christians of the Middle East. The churches which are involved in EMEU include Presbyterians and other Protestants in their relations with the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox

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<sup>7</sup> For media accounts of the SSEOE see 'Peering Over the Orthodox-Evangelical Crevasse', *Christianity Today*, October 9, 1992; 'Scholars Hope for Thaw in Evangelical-Orthodox Relations', *Christianity Today*, October 25, 1993; 'A True Meaning of Church Service', *Chicago Tribune*, October 1, 1993; 'Orthodox and Evangelical Scholars Meet', *The Word* (Antiochian Archdiocese), February, 1995; 'Orthodox, Evangelical Scholars Meet', *The Orthodox Observer* (60) April, 1995.

<sup>8</sup> *EMEU Journal* 4 (1999), p. 1.

Churches of Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Southern Sudan and neighbouring Arab countries. By organizing educational travels for American Evangelicals to the Middle East, and hosting consultations in the Middle East and North America, EMEU is forging a vital link between East and West. Unlike the SSEOE, which centres primarily on theological issues, EMEU focuses on the practical, pastoral and regional realities of the Orthodox Churches in Islamic lands. The SSEOE and EMEU nevertheless compliment each other's ministries by exploring both the doctrinal and practical realities of contemporary church life.

The third organization is the *World Council of Churches* (WCC). It is widely known that the WCC has been in existence since the turn of the century, but only since 1993 has it made a concerted effort to create a series of dialogues between the Eastern Orthodox and Evangelical communities. There were two historic events which prompted this new ecumenical venue by the WCC. First, in 1991 at the WCC's Canberra Assembly, heretical Trinitarian prayers were offered during one of the plenary sessions in which a pagan female 'spirit-goddess' was evoked rather than the Holy Spirit of the Triune God. Similar syncretistic religious expressions occurred during the Assembly and this caused the Orthodox to voice their objections. Evangelical 'observers' responded similarly which, in turn, prompted the Orthodox and Evangelicals to take notice of each other for a potential defensive alliance. Two years later, a small handful of Evangelical leaders and church representatives from the Ecumenical Patriarchate (i.e. the Orthodox Church of Constantinople) convened in Stuttgart, Germany to discuss the possibility of holding a joint conference. The impetus for an Orthodox-Evangelical dialogue included the mutual reactionary discovery of each other in the Canberra Assembly of the WCC, but also the recent fall of communism and the ensuing flood of Western missionaries to the formerly Orthodox lands of Russia and Eastern Europe. Tensions and hostilities had been rapidly rising in those parts of the world between Orthodox nationalists and Protestant missionaries who had operated on the assumption that there were few true believers in those lands and thus set as part of their missionary task the conversion of Orthodox Christians. After Stuttgart, discussions and contacts continued, especially within the framework of the Central Committee of the WCC. Eventually, the WCC sponsored two international Orthodox-Evangelical dialogues. The first was hosted by the Coptic Orthodox Church in Alexandria, Egypt from July 10-15, 1995 where forty participants gathered from around the globe. Its



proceedings were published in the book *Proclaiming Christ Today*.<sup>9</sup> The second dialogue was convened at the Missionsakademie an der Universität Hamburg, Germany, March 30-April 4, 1998 with proceedings published in the book *Turn to God, Rejoice in Hope! Orthodox-Evangelical Consultation*.<sup>10</sup> The international composition of the meeting included representatives from Greece, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Romania, Russia, Bulgaria, Albania, Sweden, UK, United States and other countries. Neither of the consultations, however, engaged in what could be described as 'substantial theological dialogues'. Instead, they would more accurately be characterised as 'relational meetings' that were primarily designed to break the ice and foster good will between the two communities. Plans for a third consultation are now underway, which may be held in Moscow or Romania in A.D. 2000.

In addition to these efforts by organisations, other attempts at dialogue have been more occasional in nature. In the UK, dialogue between Evangelicals and Orthodox is currently being carried out by a study group under the aegis of ACUTE, the theological commission of the UK Evangelical Alliance (with input from other Evangelical bodies). ACUTE sponsors a number of such groups dealing with pertinent theological issues. The study group on Orthodoxy seeks to elucidate the extent of shared convictions and differences, with special reference to the concerns of Evangelical and Orthodox constituencies in the UK. The group is meeting during 1999-2000 for discussion of papers dealing with matters of doctrine and spirituality, which will be collected and edited as a published report. This report should serve as a stimulus to further contact between Evangelicals and Orthodox in the UK. The group's aim is to introduce Evangelicals and Orthodox to each other, clear away some of the misunderstanding and lack of awareness of one another's beliefs and practices. While they are aware that fundamental disagreements between each other will remain, they are convinced that the two constituencies have much to learn from each other.<sup>11</sup> A wider circle of readers drawn from

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<sup>9</sup> *Proclaiming Christ Today*, ed. Huibert van Beek and George Lemopoulos (WCC, Geneva, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> *Turn to God, Rejoice in Hope! Orthodox-Evangelical Consultation*, ed. Huibert van Beek and George Lemopoulos (WCC, Geneva, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> Members of the group are Drs Tim Grass (Baptist and convenor of the group), John Briggs (Baptist), David Wright (Church of Scotland), Kevin Ellis (Anglican), David Hilborn (United Reformed Church), Fr John Jillions (Russian Orthodox), Mr Nigel Pocock (Ichthus, a UK 'House Church' movement), Dr Nick Needham (Baptist), and Professor Andrew Walker

Evangelical and Orthodox churches in the UK and beyond will be involved in commenting on the draft material this spring.

In the United States, in November 1999 the American Academy of Religion (AAR) held its first joint session between the *Eastern Orthodox Theology Group* (EOTG) and the *Evangelical Theology Group* (ETG). Serving as the co-chair of the EOTG with Anna Williams of Cambridge University, I proposed in 1998 that such a dialogue take place within the AAR at the next annual meeting. Dr Williams and the Steering Committee of the EOTG accepted the proposal and extended an invitation to the ETG which enthusiastically accepted. The joint session was titled, 'Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism in Dialogue'. The topics for discussion centred on Charismatic and Orthodox understandings of the spirit of tradition, Evangelical and Orthodox worship, and the sacramental notion of 'participation' in Karl Barth and St Gregory Palamas. A sizeable turnout of one hundred scholars attended the session. Students and professors from Duke Divinity School and Loyola University of Chicago presented papers followed by a response from Professor Robert Jensen of Princeton University. The very existence of such a session in the halls of the AAR demonstrates the growing relevance of Orthodox-Evangelical studies in North America and abroad, and adds further testimony to the fact that the subject has now grown to the point of being affirmed by religion scholars as a legitimate object of academic inquiry.

The country of Romania deserves special attention in this article given its religious history and strategic place among the Orthodox churches. Romania contains one of the largest populations of Orthodox Christians in the world today, second only to Russia. Although historic difficulties remain in the areas of communication and religious freedom between Orthodox and Evangelical believers in Romania, small steps of progress are slowly being made in the wake of the post-communist era. The country holds much promise for constructive relations. At present, however, the 'dialogue' in Romania remains weak and indirect, consisting mostly of a growing awareness of the need to explore the points of contact between each other. Academically speaking, there are more Evangelical students of Romanian Orthodoxy than there are Orthodox students of Romanian Evangelicalism. Some of the leading proponents on the Evangelical side of the Romanian dialogue include Silviu Eugen Rogobete who heads the *Areopagus Centre for Christian Studies and Contemporary Culture* located in Timisoara. Part of the Centre's mission is to build bridges with

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(Russian Orthodox). For more information contact Tim Grass at Grass@tesco.net.

the local Romanian Orthodox Church through cultural and religious dialogue. The Centre is housed in a relatively small building with a library, classroom and office space.<sup>12</sup> Other Evangelical leaders who are attempting dialogue include Paul Negrut (Principal of Emanuel Bible Institute in Oradea), Emil Bartos (the Dean), and Danuet Manastireanu (World Vision). On the Orthodox side are Fr Ion Bria (now retired but an active participant in the WCC's Orthodox-Evangelical dialogues), Vasile Mihoc (Professor of New Testament at Sibi University and Director of World Vision Romania), and Stelian Tofana (Professor of New Testament at Cluj University). A truly exciting theological renaissance of theses and doctoral dissertations on Orthodox theology is now underway among Romanian Evangelical students of the Orthodox Church. The writings of the great Romanian Orthodox theologian, Fr Dumitru Staniloae, have become a special object of Evangelical interest due to Staniloae's popularity and enduring influence in Romania and abroad. Beyond Staniloae, wider Evangelical interests have begun to explore Orthodox approaches to Scripture, authority and soteriology.<sup>13</sup> Although Evangelicals are in a distinct minority in Romania, the new and creative interest in Orthodoxy that is on the rise among the younger generation of scholars – coupled with the changing attitudes toward Evangelical theology by a small group of Orthodox leaders – makes Romania the most fertile soil in Eastern Europe for the growth of an emerging global dialogue.

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<sup>12</sup> Email areopag@mail.dnttm.ro for further information.

<sup>13</sup> A nearly exhaustive list of recent theses and dissertations are as follows: Paul Negrut, *The Development of the Concept of 'Authority' Within the Romanian Orthodox Church in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Ph.D. dissertation, London Bible College/Brunel University, London, 1994), parts of which were recently published as *Revelation, Scripture, Communion. An Investigation of 'Authority' in Theological Knowledge* (Oradea, 1996); Silviu Eugen Rogobete, *Subject and Supreme Personal Reality in the Theological Thought of Fr Dumitru Staniloae: An Ontology of Love* (Ph.D. dissertation, London Bible College/Brunel University, London, 1998); Emil Bartos, *The Concept of Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology With Detailed Reference to Dumitru Staniloae* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wales, Lampeter, 1997) revised as *The Concept of 'Theosis' in the Theology of Dumitru Staniloae* (Oradea, 1999); Gheorghe Verzea, *Salvation in the Church in the Theology of Dumitru Staniloae* (Ph.D. dissertation, Queens University Belfast, 1996); and Danut Manastireanu, *The Place of Scripture in the Orthodox Tradition* (M. A. thesis, London Bible College/Brunel University, London, 1994). Credit belongs to Mr Danut Manastireanu for most of the information provided in this footnote and the above paragraph.

What it needs to succeed and flourish is for the Orthodox to initiate a stronger public stance in reaching out to Evangelical institutions and churches at all levels – from the ecumenical department of the Romanian Patriarchate down to the grass roots levels of local Orthodox priests and laypeople. These initiatives may include setting up special ecumenical dialogue commissions, creating faculty exchanges in which Orthodox and Evangelical history and theology may be taught in each other's schools, the creation of theological journals in which both sides can participate in a shared forum, and personal visits to each other's local churches in an atmosphere of Christian love. Clearly the Orthodox are in a stronger position of influence than are Evangelicals and therefore they bear the heavier weight of responsibility for achieving Christian unity in Romania. Nothing less than courageous initiatives by Orthodox leaders, lay and ordained, can break the decades of hatred, fear and ignorance toward Evangelical Christianity which continue to dominate the perceptions of the Romanian Orthodox peoples. Similarly, nothing less than bold initiatives by Evangelical leaders, lay and ordained, that may risk offending their Protestant constituency will be able to move Evangelicals beyond the misconceptions and popular abuses of the Orthodox faith.

### Scholars

There is a small but growing number of individual scholars who are slowly beginning to publish works on Orthodox and Evangelical theology. It appears that there is more activity on the side of Evangelical interest in Orthodoxy rather than vice versa.<sup>14</sup> A surprising number of Evangelical converts to Orthodoxy in America over the past 15 years has caught the Evangelical community off guard and recently prompted a few well-known conservative writers to respond to the growing losses within their ranks. Representatives of this group would be R.C. Sproul,<sup>15</sup> visiting professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Knox Theological Seminary in

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<sup>14</sup> An exception can be found in the popular apologetic books and tracts against Evangelicals written by Orthodox priests and layworkers in America. Peter Gillquist and Frank Schaeffer would fall into this category. Much less apologetic literature has been published by Evangelicals against Orthodoxy, with the exception of older mission agencies such as Spiros Zodhiates' former 'American Mission to the Greeks'.

<sup>15</sup> R.C. Sproul's Ligonier Ministry magazine, *Tabletalk* (June, 1999), with several articles devoted to attacking the 'heretical' teachings and practices of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and Hank Hannegraaff,<sup>16</sup> also known as 'The Bible Answer Man', a popular radio apologist and cult-watcher who succeeded the late Walter Martin.

Beyond these reactions from the Evangelical right, more informed and balanced Evangelical theologians are aggressively widening their perspectives on Orthodoxy through a study of ancient and modern writers of the Christian East. Their motivation appears to be rooted in a healthy self-awareness of the deficiencies and gaps which are currently present in modern theology, and the laudable desire for growth. Some proceed in their studies with an awareness that patristic and Byzantine theology are foundational not only to historic Christianity in both East and West, but are especially formative to the contemporary identity of the Eastern Orthodox Church. A brief survey of selected scholars and their works will show the direction in which Evangelicals are charting their studies of the Christian East.

Gerald Bray, a British Evangelical now working in America, is one of the most knowledgeable and linguistically competent researchers in Eastern Orthodoxy today. The breadth of his linguistic skills puts Bray at the forefront of Evangelical scholarship. He is fluent not only in the biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek, but also in Latin, Byzantine Greek, modern Greek and Russian. A specialist in historical theology and Anglican canon law, Bray teaches courses (among many others) in Greek and Latin patristics and has written on theological topics which are central to Orthodoxy in the ancient and modern worlds. A selection of his writings include 'Eastern Orthodox Theology',<sup>17</sup> 'Justification and the Eastern Orthodox Churches',<sup>18</sup> 'The *Filioque* Clause in History and Theology'<sup>19</sup> and the books *The Doctrine of God*<sup>20</sup> (which deals extensively with Orthodoxy as well as early Christian thought), *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*,<sup>21</sup> and his patristic commentaries in the *Ancient*

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<sup>16</sup> Featuring 'Searching for the True Apostolic Church: What Evangelicals Should Know About Eastern Orthodoxy', Paul Negrut in *Christian Research Journal* 20:3 (1998).

<sup>17</sup> Gerald Bray in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, J.I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL, 1998), pp. 215-18.

<sup>18</sup> Gerald Bray in *Here We Stand*, ed. J.I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL, 1993), p. 83 ff..

<sup>19</sup> Gerald Bray, 'The *Filioque* Clause in History and Theology', *Tyndale Bulletin* 34 (1983), pp. 91-144.

<sup>20</sup> Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove, IL 1993).

<sup>21</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Downers Grove, IL 1998).

*Christian Commentary on Scripture* (ACW)<sup>22</sup> (Romans, 1,2 Corinthians, and James to Jude, to be discussed below under the work of Thomas Oden). Bray characterizes his stance toward Orthodoxy as follows:

My stance vis-a-via Orthodoxy is sympathetic but not uncritical. I do not share the fascination with Orthodoxy which characterizes some people in the West (after living in both Greece and Russia it is hard to romanticise the Orthodox Church) but I am very sympathetic to the underlying theological concerns of Orthodoxy and believe that there is a lot of common ground with Evangelical Protestants (and others, of course) which we need to explore. I suppose you could say that I am in the C. S. Lewis tradition of 'mere Christianity' – looking for what unites us across the cultural and historical differences, and concentrating on that.<sup>23</sup>

What sets Bray apart from other Evangelicals in the 'C. S. Lewis tradition', however, is his concentration on the Orthodox faith as vitally central to that tradition. While others, such as Lewis and G. K. Chesterton, have explored 'orthodoxy' through the Fathers, creeds and councils of 'historic Christianity', Bray has linked much of that 'historic Christianity' to the ongoing institutional and spiritual life of the Orthodox Church. In this way, Bray does not deal with a *disembodied* orthodoxy but an orthodoxy that has largely been the achievement of the *Byzantine Orthodox Church* and the theological legacy which it has bequeathed for much of Protestant and Catholic orthodoxy today.

Another important scholar working between the traditions is Thomas Oden. According to Oden,

In *Agenda for Theology* (1979) I proposed a program of post-modern paleo-orthodoxy which would seek to reground contemporary theology in the consensual classic Christian sources. Everything I have done since has sought to develop that premise. The three volumes of *Systematic Theology*, of course, have constant reference to patristic sources, as do *Pastoral Theology* and the four volume work on *Classical Pastoral Care*.<sup>24</sup>

Oden utilises a theological method which proceeds from the conviction that the consensus of the Church Fathers during the first millennium of Christian history constitutes a normative status for defining Christian

<sup>22</sup> *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, General Editor, Thomas Oden, Vol. VI, VII, XI edited by Gerald Bray (Downers Grove, IL 1998, 99, 2000 respectively).

<sup>23</sup> Email from Gerald Bray to the author (July 23, 1999).

<sup>24</sup> Email from Thomas Oden to the author (July 21, 1999).

orthodoxy. This doctrinal history includes the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils (A.D. 325-787), the *consensus patrum*, the church's *lex orandi*, pastoral theology and other expressions of 'catholic' Christianity. In addition to the works cited above, a recent project which reveals Oden's premise most decisively is his editorial work on a new 27-volume collection of patristic commentaries on the entire Bible. Titled the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, this series is the first modern patristic commentary of its kind from the pen of a leading Evangelical theologian and leading Evangelical publishing house (Inter Varsity Press). Oden describes the nature and purpose of the project in the 'General Introduction':

The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture has as its goal the revitalisation of Christian teaching based on classical Christian exegesis... This series provides the pastor, exegete, student and lay reader with convenient means to see what Athanasius or John Chrysostom or the desert fathers and mothers had to say about a particular text for preaching, for study and for meditation. There is an emerging awareness among Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox laity that vital biblical preaching and spiritual formation need deeper grounding beyond the scope of the historical-critical orientations that have governed biblical studies in our day. Hence this work is directed toward a much broader audience than the highly technical and specialised scholarly field of patristic studies.<sup>25</sup>

Clearly this is an intentionally ecumenical project whose team of volume editors originates from Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox scholars and who, under Oden, designed the project to edify those audiences. The fact that the series is not being manufactured and sold by a Roman Catholic or Orthodox publishing house, but Inter Varsity Press, shows how remarkable a renaissance of patristic studies is now underway among Evangelicals the world over. The impact which this series will very likely have on future Orthodox and Evangelical dialogue is potentially enormous. Since the Church Fathers played a formative role in shaping the identity of the Eastern Orthodox Church, the series will naturally encourage readers to think beyond the ancient Christian commentators themselves to the church which has most deeply appropriated those sources. Inevitably, it will prompt Evangelicals to explore in much greater depth the Christological, Trinitarian, ecclesiological and sacramental themes of the early Church Fathers and that of the Orthodox Church, the Fathers' heir apparent. This does not mean that the Fathers gave us a single authoritative interpretation

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. xi.

of every verse of the Bible. As the series makes evident, there are varied patristic interpretations on any given text of Scripture. Oden is under no illusion of concocting a uniform exegetical tradition by all the Fathers on any given text of Scripture. He recognises that there are many varieties of interpretations within almost every pericope. Yet it is also evident that there are central exegetical motifs that correspond to the great themes of Eastern Orthodox theology. By letting the Fathers speak for themselves, the ACW series reflects the Fathers' wide differences in cultural expression and theological creativity while at the same time yielding a remarkable consensus on central themes of divine Revelation. Such a discovery can only lead Evangelicals into a deeper appreciation of Orthodoxy while at the same time accentuating its similarities to and differences from the Catholic and Protestant traditions.

By virtually all accounts, J.I. Packer is an Evangelical statesman. As he reaches the golden years of his career we notice that he has begun to take a serious interest in conservative Christian dialogue with the hopes of forming a common agenda for the church's unified witness in the modern world. His work in 'Evangelical ecumenics' (to coin a phrase) began most visibly in his dialogue with Catholics in 1995 which led to his signing the document 'Evangelicals and Catholics Together'. Although his interest in Orthodoxy began much earlier, it was not until 1995 that it took concrete expression at a conservative ecumenical gathering of Catholics, Orthodox and Evangelicals called the 'Rose Hill' conference. It was there that Dr Packer and the present author worked as formal dialogue partners. At Rose Hill, Packer delivered a paper titled, 'On from Orr: Cultural Crisis, Rational Realism and Incarnational Ontology', to which I responded with 'An Eastern Orthodox Response to J.I. Packer'.<sup>26</sup> The dialogue was followed up in 1997 when Packer and the author team-taught a course at Regent College, Vancouver entitled, 'Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism in Dialogue'.<sup>27</sup> This dialogical course was an historic first of its kind among Evangelical seminaries in North America. Given Packer's distinguished stature and the constructive theological purpose of the course, the class proved that such a dialogue between Orthodox and Evangelicals was not only possible, but that it could actually achieve a

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<sup>26</sup> James Cutsinger, ed. *Reclaiming the Great Tradition: Evangelicals, Catholics and Orthodox in Dialogue* (Downers Grove, 1997), pp. 155-84. See also Packer's 'Christian Morality Adrift', delivered to the Faith and Renewal Conference with an Orthodox response by Fr Stanley Harakas in Kevin Perrota, ed. *A Society in Peril* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1989).

<sup>27</sup> Available on audio tape through Regent College bookstore.



common witness without requiring either to compromise the doctrinal integrity of his position. Then, in September 1999, Dr Packer advanced the Orthodox-Evangelical dialogue in America by being the featured Evangelical speaker at the annual meeting of the *Society for the Study of Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism*.<sup>28</sup> The theme for the conference was, “‘Outside the Church There is No Salvation’: An Orthodox and Evangelical Exchange’. The conference turned out to be the largest gathering of Orthodox and Evangelical Christians to date with approximately two hundred people in attendance.

In addition to Bray, Oden and Packer, the work of other scholars should also be mentioned, if ever so briefly. They come from Calvinist, Anglican, Anabaptist, Free Church, Nazarene, Mennonite, Wesleyan, Pentecostal and other denominations. Included in this list would be Miroslav Volf,<sup>29</sup> Grant Osborne,<sup>30</sup> Harold O.J. Brown,<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Dr Edward Rommen was the lead Orthodox speaker. Rommen is a former tenured professor in the Missions Department at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL. His conversion to the Orthodox Church was reported in *Christianity Today* (August 11, 1998).

<sup>29</sup> Volf offers the most penetrating Free Church critique of modern Orthodox and Catholic ‘communion’ ecclesiologies as developed by John Zizioulas and Cardinal Ratzinger respectively. Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, 1997). Volf is a Croatian Pentecostal formerly at Fuller Seminary and now at Yale. The trajectory of his career and theological interests witness to the growth of Evangelical scholarship in the direction of an ‘ecumenical orthodoxy’ which envisions the collegial model of ‘communion’ ecclesiology in Orthodoxy to be more compatible with Evangelical theology than does the papal model of ‘communion’ ecclesiology in Roman Catholicism.

<sup>30</sup> Osborne offers the finest hermeneutical comparison to date in ‘The Many and the One: The Interface Between Eastern Orthodox and Protestant Evangelical Hermeneutics’, *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 3 (1995), pp. 281-304. The paper was originally delivered to the SSEOE where Osborne is an active dialogue partner. He is Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Deerfield, IL).

<sup>31</sup> One of the few Evangelical students who did their doctoral work under the late Orthodox theologian George Florovsky at Princeton. Brown has been an effective interpreter of Florovsky for the Evangelical community, though at times he squeezes Florovsky into an uncomfortably tight pair of Evangelical shoes. His recent effort to apply Florovsky’s theological method for Evangelical systematics can be seen in ‘On Method and Means in Theology’, in *Doing Theology in Today’s World: Essays in Honour of Kenneth S. Kantzer*, ed. John D. Woodbridge and Thomas E. McComiskey

Daniel Clendenin,<sup>32</sup> James Stamoolis,<sup>33</sup> Donald Bloesch,<sup>34</sup> Kent Hill,<sup>35</sup> Mark Noll,<sup>36</sup> Kenneth Kantzer,<sup>37</sup> Randy Maddox,<sup>38</sup> Thomas Finger,<sup>39</sup> T.F.

(Grand Rapids, 1991), pp. 147-69.

- <sup>32</sup> Clendenin's exposure to Orthodoxy came while living in Moscow for several years as a religion professor at Moscow State University. A widely read two-volume work introducing Orthodoxy to western readers resulted: *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective* (Grand Rapids, 1994); *ibid.*, *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader* (Grand Rapids, 1995). Clendenin's chief contribution is his synthesis of the essential points of Orthodox writers in the secondary literature, and focused interpretation of those facts for a Protestant Evangelical audience.
- <sup>33</sup> Stamoolis was one of the founding members of the SSEOE. He is a Baptist with a Greek Orthodox upbringing. Formerly the Dean of the Wheaton Graduate School, he now serves as the Executive Director of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship. Sympathetic, yet also constructively critical of the Eastern Church, his contribution to the dialogue to date has mainly been in the area of Orthodox missions. See James Stamoolis, *Eastern Orthodox Mission Theology* (Maryknoll, NY, 1986). For his reflections on why he became an Evangelical see 'Reflections on Becoming Evangelical' in the *Occasional Bulletin* of the Evangelical Missiological Society, 11:1 (1999), pp. 3-4.
- <sup>34</sup> A participant in the SSEOE where he delivered a paper entitled, 'Salvation in Protestant Evangelicalism' (1993), from his monumental series on *Christian Foundations*, Vol. 2 (Downers Grove, 1997).
- <sup>35</sup> Kent Hill, *The Puzzle of the Soviet Church: An Inside Look at Christianity and Glasnost* (Portland, 1991). Hill has also been an active participant and supporter of the SSEOE.
- <sup>36</sup> Although he has not written much in the field, he is a member of the SSEOE, personal friend and faithful encourager of Orthodox-Evangelical dialogue. His use of the late Fr George Florovsky's views on the task of the Christian historian remains fundamental to his class lectures in the History of Western Civilisation course at Wheaton College.
- <sup>37</sup> Expressed in his involvement with and endorsement of the SSEOE: 'Nothing but good could come from serious conversations between Eastern Orthodox thinkers and conservative Evangelicals. This society provides just such a forum.'
- <sup>38</sup> Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, 1994). One of Maddox's goals is to find in Wesley an instructive integration of theological emphases that have traditionally separated Eastern and Western Christianity.
- <sup>39</sup> Thomas Finger, 'Anabaptism and Eastern Orthodoxy: Some Unexpected Similarities?' *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (Fall, 1995), originally delivered to the SSEOE.

Torrance,<sup>40</sup> Elaine Storkey,<sup>41</sup> Vinay Samuel,<sup>42</sup> David Dockery<sup>43</sup> and others<sup>44</sup> whom no doubt I have missed. It would be claiming too much to say that each of these individuals is an expert on the Christian East, but each in his own way has begun to lead the Evangelical community into a more advanced level of academic dialogue than ever before. In fact, Zondervan, a leading Evangelical publishing house, has very recently acknowledged the study of Orthodoxy as a lacuna which needs to be filled in Evangelical scholarship today. In July 1999 it commissioned the

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<sup>40</sup> Torrance pleads for space in the Evangelical establishment of North America, but less so in Europe. Concerns of North American Evangelicals have been partly due to his theological epistemology and de-emphasising of propositional revelation. Nevertheless his rare mastery of the language and literature of the Eastern Church (ancient and modern), coupled with his relatively conservative ecumenism from a Calvinist platform, makes it impossible to overlook his contributions. Evangelicals should interact with his proposals more thoroughly than they have to date. Among his writings, too numerous to list, see his recent work on the Reformed-Eastern Orthodox dialogue in *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement* (Edinburgh, 1994).

<sup>41</sup> Elaine Storkey, 'The WCC Statement on Mission: A Paper for Discussion' in *Turn to God, Rejoice in Hope! Orthodox-Evangelical Consultation, Hamburg, Germany, 1998* (WCC Publication, Geneva, 1998), pp. 75-9. Storkey has been John Stott's assistant of the Institute for Contemporary Christianity, London.

<sup>42</sup> Notable more for his participation in the WCC's Orthodox-Evangelical consultation, Hamburg, Germany, 1998 than for his academic writing. He is Executive Director for the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies.

<sup>43</sup> David Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, 1992). It demonstrates the recovery of the ancient exegetical tradition by a Baptist New Testament scholar. The Baptists Glen Hinson and Charles Scalesh do similarly except in the areas of evangelism, patristic ecclesiology, sacramental theology and theological hermeneutics.

<sup>44</sup> Craig Blaising, *Scripture, Tradition and Authority: A Response to Emmanuel Clapsis*, unpublished paper delivered to the SSEOE (1995), and Secretary-Treasurer of the SSEOE (1995-97); Robert Rakestraw, 'Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of *Theosis*', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 2 (1994); Gabriel Fackre, *The Christian Story*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 3 vols (Grand Rapids, 1995 ff.). Fackre grew up with a father from a Middle Eastern, Orthodox home; Walter Sawatsky, a Mennonite who has published numerous books and articles on Evangelicals in Russia; Cecil Robeck, a Pentecostal, has also worked in Cyprian's ecclesiology in light of contemporary ecumenical Catholic and Orthodox discussions.

publication of a new book in its 'Counterpoint Series' which will be devoted exclusively to this subject. It is tentatively entitled, *Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism: Conflict or Compatibility?*, edited by James Stamoolis (forthcoming, 2002? ).

Theology is not the only field of Evangelical scholarship that is engaging the Orthodox Church today. Evangelical psychologists are also appropriating insights from the monastic Fathers of the Byzantine, Syrian and Coptic Orthodox Churches. Without minimising the essential role which theology must play in healing the wounds between Orthodox and Evangelical believers, there is also great practical value in enlisting the resources of Orthodox anthropology into the service of Christian psychology. The best scholar who has been working specially in this area is Dr Janice Strength, a professor of family therapy at Fuller Seminary's School of Psychology. She is also the co-founder of a graduate school of Christian psychology in Moscow whose leadership and student body is overwhelmingly Orthodox. In a chapter entitled 'From Conflict to Love: Suggestions for Healing the Christian Family', Strength offers the Orthodox and Evangelical communities a very sensitive analysis of the dynamics of human nature and conflict resolution along with guidelines for Orthodox-Evangelical dialogue in Russia from a family therapist's point of view.<sup>45</sup>

When turning to the Orthodox side of the dialogue, we regret to report that with but a few notable exceptions,<sup>46</sup> theologians in Russia and Greece have little or no contact with Evangelicals and are even disdainful of them mainly because of Evangelical missions – which are frequently successful in Russia but often unsuccessful in Greece.

Outside Russia and Greece, Orthodox theologians are working to build bridges with Evangelicals at a variety of levels. I am reluctant to speak about myself, but I have been honoured to devote a portion of my

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<sup>45</sup> Janice Strength, 'From Conflict to Love: Suggestions for Healing the Christian Family', in *God in Russia: The Challenge of Freedom*, eds S. Linzey and K. Kaisch (New York, forthcoming 1999 referenced by prepublication permission of the author), n. p.

<sup>46</sup> Such as the St Petersburg Evangelical Theological Academy which includes Russian Orthodox professors on its faculty (see further under 'Seminaries and Universities'). Other exceptions would be Russian Orthodox leaders Frs Alexander Borisov, the late Alexander Menn, and Metropolitan Kyrill. I know of no such counterparts in Greece, though Archbishop Demetrios Trakatellis would have qualified as a friend of Evangelicals in Athens before leaving Greece in 1999 to become the new Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in North America.

scholarship to this area as an Orthodox theologian. I have already noted three contributions in the above paragraphs: the SSEOE, the rejoinder chapter 'An Eastern Orthodox Response to J.I. Packer', and a team-taught course at Regent College, Vancouver with Dr Packer on 'Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism in Dialogue'. In addition are the following chapters and essays: An introductory guide to the study of Eastern Orthodoxy written specially for Evangelical students of theology can be found in my chapter 'New Dimensions in Eastern Orthodox Theology'.<sup>47</sup> Though intended for a North American audience with little familiarity with European languages, it serves as an introduction to the principal features of Orthodox theology and the methodological pitfalls to avoid when studying it. A suggested missiological strategy for Evangelicals who are ministering in Orthodox lands such as Russia and Eastern Europe is outlined in the essay 'Evangelical Missions in Eastern Orthodox Lands'.<sup>48</sup> Also in the field of missiology see the brief article on 'Orthodox Mission Movements' in the *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. Charles van Engen *et al.* (Baker, forthcoming). In the area of comparative spirituality, the author delivered a public lecture at Regent College on 'Eastern Orthodox and Evangelical Spirituality: The Core of a Common Agenda'.<sup>49</sup> On the international scene, I was privileged to serve as a featured speaker for the Orthodox-Evangelical consultations sponsored by the World Council of Churches in Alexandria, Egypt and Hamburg, Germany,<sup>50</sup> as noted above. Currently I am compiling the past eight years of annual papers delivered to the 'Society for the Study of Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism' which will hopefully be published as a book in the next few years. I am also preparing a chapter for the forthcoming book *Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism: Conflict or Compatibility?*, ed. James Stamoolis (Zondervan, as noted earlier). There I hope to set forth my past 30 years of theological study and experience in Orthodox and Evangelical theology by arguing why I believe they are compatible in key areas yet incompatible in others. These works are supplemented by several graduate courses on Orthodox history, theology and missions which I teach in both Orthodox

<sup>47</sup> *New Dimensions in Evangelical Thought: Essays in Honour of Millard Erickson*, ed. David Dockery (Downers Grove, IL, 1998), pp. 92-117.

<sup>48</sup> *Trinity World Forum* (Winter, 1996), published by Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Deerfield, IL).

<sup>49</sup> Available on audio cassette at Regent College Bookstore, Vancouver, B. C., Canada.

<sup>50</sup> 'Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism in Dialogue', *Turn to God, Rejoice in Hope! Orthodox-Evangelical Consultation*, Hamburg, 30 March-4 April, 1998 (World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1998), pp. 69-74.

and Protestant Evangelical seminaries throughout North America (to be discussed below under 'Seminaries').

Other Orthodox theologians have contributed occasional papers or offered specific direction on the Church's relationship to Evangelical scholarship. Such publications are by no means abundant but the scholars themselves, and what they are calling for, is highly significant due to their strategic ecclesiastical positions within the Orthodox Church. These theologians are Frs Stanley Harakas,<sup>51</sup> Theodore Stylianopoulos,<sup>52</sup> Emmanuel Clapsis,<sup>53</sup> Bishop Kallistos Ware,<sup>54</sup> Archbishop Philip Saliba,<sup>55</sup> Edward Rommen,<sup>56</sup> Eusebius Stephanou,<sup>57</sup> and a small but growing number of local Orthodox priests<sup>58</sup> across North America. A

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<sup>51</sup> Stanley Harakas, *On Theological Method*, unpublished paper delivered to the SSEOE (1996).

<sup>52</sup> Featured speaker on Orthodox spirituality at the SSEOE meeting, Billy Graham Centre, Wheaton College, 1995. See his further comments below.

<sup>53</sup> Emmanuel Clapsis, *Scripture, Tradition and Authority: An Eastern Orthodox View*, delivered to the SSEOE, 1995.

<sup>54</sup> Unpublished paper on 'The Holy Spirit in the Eastern Church Fathers' given at a Pentecostal-Orthodox dialogue in Prague, 1998, forthcoming in the SSEOE volume. Ware will also be the featured Orthodox speaker at the upcoming SSEOE meeting in 2001.

<sup>55</sup> Primate of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America who admitted members of the Evangelical Orthodox Church into the Antiochian church in 1987.

<sup>56</sup> An Evangelical convert to Orthodoxy in 1997. See 'Reflections on Becoming Orthodox' in *The Occasional Bulletin* of the Evangelical Missiological Society 11 (1999), pp. 1-3.

<sup>57</sup> Stephanou is a cradle Greek Orthodox with five graduate degrees in theology from Greece and the US. He has promoted Orthodox renewal along evangelical lines for over three decades. Once highly controversial in the Greek Archdiocese – for perceptions of spiritual imbalance along charismatic lines, not dogmatic heresy – he was persecuted by Church authorities but never excommunicated. He now enjoys the blessing of the Church hierarchy on his organization, 'The Brotherhood of St. Symeon the New Theologian'. The brotherhood is a spiritual renewal group which holds quarterly renewal conferences at its headquarters in Destin, FL and publishes a bi-monthly periodical *The Orthodox Evangelist* (formerly *The Logos*). Much of his current work is devoted to Orthodox evangelism and physical and emotional healing of individuals and families. He has also been instrumental in promoting the ministry of a dynamic young Orthodox evangelist, Charles Omuroka, from Kenya, East Africa.

<sup>58</sup> The local Orthodox parishes have been the least affected by the dialogue. As so often happens in ecumenical discussions, the conclusions reached often

sample of Orthodox endorsements of the SSEOE will indicate the strength of Pan-Orthodox interest in Evangelical dialogue:

We are happy to endorse the good work you and your organization are doing to promote fellowship and mutual enrichment among those engaged in your activities. We hope that you will be fruitful and multiply in membership so that the message of Jesus Christ according to the biblical and apostolic teachings will be known to all.

*Archbishop Philip Saliba,  
Primate of the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America*

The SSEOE is fulfilling a vital role.... How much we have to gain from listening to each other! May Jesus Christ, our common Lord and Saviour, bless your work.

*Bishop Kallistos (Timothy) Ware,  
Oxford University*

In the post-Soviet world, with the opening of traditionally Orthodox nations to the potential for open proselytism, Evangelical and Orthodox relations can go in one of two directions: either return to the dangers of a pre-ecumenical era, or change the course of history. The SSEOE has already begun addressing this important theological and practical missiological question. Much good can come of such a scholarly dialogue.

*Fr Stanley Harakas, Professor of Theology and Ethics, Emeritus,  
Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Seminary*

Of special importance are the remarks by Fr Theodore Stylianopoulos, a seasoned Professor of New Testament at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Seminary (Brookline, MA). As Stylianopoulos has matured over the years, he has become openly bold and forthright in his desire to interface with Evangelical scholarship in the area of theology and biblical studies.

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get stuck at the top and seldom filter down to practical church life. A notable exception, however, can be found at St Paul's Greek Orthodox Church (Irvine, CA). The pastor, Fr Steve Tschilis, hosted the annual SSEOE meeting at the church in September 1999 where Drs J.I. Packer and Edward Rommen spoke to a record audience. Fr Steve is a solid cradle Orthodox man who is also open to constructive dialogue with Evangelicals in the Southern California area. The church is a model Pan-Orthodox parish with an outstanding Sunday School program headed by Eve Tibbs, an Orthodox graduate student at Fuller Seminary, consisting of a comprehensive curriculum of Bible training, Orthodox history, liturgy, and spirituality.

Apparently this has been the result of years of interaction with Evangelicals in the Boston area, including co-operative work with Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (an evangelical consortium school of Holy Cross), visits to Gordon McDonald's church in the Boston area (an active participant in the Society for the Study of Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism), and similar Orthodox-Evangelical contacts. He states,

Many Evangelical scholars such as Donald G. Bloesch, Gordon D. Fee, and James I. Packer, appear to have the closest affinities to Orthodox scholars, at least pertaining to Scripture. These and other Evangelicals form a kind of 'golden mean' between fundamentalism and liberal Protestantism, working out their own kind of 'neo-patristic synthesis' within the diverse world of Protestantism. To be sure, such Evangelicals need to rethink the 'ecclesial principle' as expressed by the Orthodox tradition, and some are doing so. However, pertaining to the 'scripture principle'... these Evangelical scholars... appear to be even more 'patristic' than many Orthodox who think of the patristic heritage as their own inheritance.

Again I would stress that, if the 'ecclesial principle' as well is brought into play, Orthodox and Evangelical scholars can support each other in substantive terms on the basis of their unanimity on classic Christian doctrine as a summary of abiding biblical truth. Their theological commitments and contemporary circumstances drive them together to work toward a common witness and common biblical hermeneutics.... [T]hose who affirm the authority of Scripture and seek to live and work with some balance between faith and reason, will continue to gravitate toward a consensus that is called either 'evangelical catholicity' or 'catholic evangelicalism' as the enduring Christian option of the third millennium.<sup>59</sup>

These comments by a scholar of Stylianopoulos's stature should not be glossed over as ecumenical rhetoric. His call for mutual support is clear, specific and authoritative. If Stylianopoulos is correct, then Orthodox and Evangelical biblical scholars and churchmen have no other option but to take this invitation seriously and respond to it with specific and decisive action. Such action might include creating joint biblical consultations, exploring faculty exchange programs (which can break down caricatures and stereotypes), initiating collaborative writing projects in the areas of ecclesiology, canon formation, tradition, and scriptural hermeneutics, and other projects.

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<sup>59</sup> Theodore G. Stylianopoulos, *The New Testament: An Orthodox Perspective*, Vol. 1 (Brookline, MA), 1997, pp. 227-8, 232, 212. This last quotation refers not only to Protestant Evangelicals but also to Roman Catholics and Orthodox.



From the perspective of the big picture, then, if one were to ask where, geographically, the Orthodox-Evangelical dialogue is being most fruitfully nurtured in the world, the answer would be found in the United States. This should come as no surprise to readers since North America is saturated with Evangelical Christianity and it is precisely because Evangelicals enjoy a position of religious dominance in American culture that the American Orthodox have been forced to respond to its influence. That response has contributed in part to the rise of what may be termed an 'American Orthodox theology'. By that I mean that Orthodox theologians in America have been forced to draw upon the rich theological resources of their own tradition in order to respond creatively to the challenges of American religion – including American Evangelicalism. Just as there are characteristic theological emphases in Greece, Romania, Bulgaria and elsewhere due to the political, historical, geographical, and religious questions which have faced the Orthodox Church and required it to address itself to the special challenges of those given contexts, so also have the Orthodox in America begun slowly to offer theological responses which are culturally and theologically relevant to them.

But here lies an interesting irony. Whereas in places like Russia and Eastern Europe, the Orthodox Church has occupied a position of religious dominance over Evangelical churches, in America the Evangelical community enjoys the position of dominance over the minority of Orthodox churches. These simple facts bear significantly on the question of why the Orthodox-Evangelical dialogue is fairing better in the US than anywhere else in the world. One could offer several explanations to account for it but perhaps the most significant reason is due to the American tolerance of religious pluralism. In America, Christians enjoy the constitutional privilege of 'freedom of religion'. Orthodox leaders in Russia and Eastern Europe should take note of this fact because it contradicts the cherished assumption that only a legally imposed protection of Orthodoxy can ensure the spiritual health of the Orthodox people. In fact just the opposite has been true in America. It is precisely because of our religious freedoms that an increasing number of Evangelicals want to explore the Orthodox Church independently from the cultural imposition of an offending legislation. Put simply, the only Orthodoxy worth joining is the one that has been freely explored and understood. Likewise, the few influential Orthodox theologians in America who have an informed knowledge of Evangelical scholarship understand that these believers are not at all to be lumped together with cults and sects as if they were part of one great sea of undifferentiated darkness. On the contrary, they see its

followers as true believers who live in dynamic Christian communities which possess a respectable intellectual heritage of scholarship.

What is happening in the American dialogue thus brings exciting possibilities for reconstruction and renewal in the mother Orthodox countries. This should not be construed, however, as a demeaning of the mother Orthodox Churches outside America since they will always remain highly valued by the American Orthodox people. Nevertheless it seems hardly debatable that the mantle is falling to their spiritual children in the United States to achieve the kind of constructive approach to Evangelicalism which the older lands have not been able to accomplish as effectively thus far. That being said, however, it would be quite misleading to paint an overly optimistic portrait of Orthodox-Evangelical relations in America. To be sure, not all is rosy in the United States. Major challenges and obstacles remain for both the academy and the church, challenges to which we shall now turn.

### **Seminaries and Universities**

On the missiological front, walls of tension and hostility between Orthodox and Evangelicals have been rising in pockets of Russia and Eastern Europe since the fall of communism. A staggering number of approximately seven hundred Western missionary agencies have been documented as presently at work in these countries.<sup>60</sup> Very few missionaries, however, are prepared to operate with even a basic grasp of the countries' history, culture or language. There is almost a total lack of missionary preparation being given to Evangelical students who minister in those countries. It is no wonder that Orthodox believers are insulted that some Protestant missionaries have come into their country on the assumption that Russia (or other Eastern European block countries) is a heathen nation with no presence or history of the gospel. Some hold evangelistic meetings with only a superficial concern for discipling new believers. As a result Orthodox leaders have shown increasingly strong resentment toward missionaries who have attempted to convert or proselytise their parishioners. Yet Western Evangelicals are equally offended that some Russian Orthodox churchmen have confused them with a cult or sect. They are astonished and angry that the Orthodox would take such extreme measures as to outlaw their ministries in the country. They

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<sup>60</sup> Sharon Linzey, Holt Ruffin and Mark Elliot, eds *East-West Christian Organisations: A Directory of Western Christian Organisations Working in East Central Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (Evanston, IL, 1993).

are bewildered by the behaviour of right wing nationalists who have burned the bridges for dialogue by doing such things as holding a literal bonfire to destroy the theological books of ecumenists John Meyendorff, Alexander Schmemmann and George Florovsky who by nearly all accounts are ranked among this century's greatest Orthodox theologians.

I am only skimming the surface of these problems which I trust are well known to the reader. For those on the mission field they are lively issues which sometimes impinge upon their very survival. What all this underscores is the fact that if Orthodox and Evangelicals want to 'preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (Eph. 4:3) they must begin by widening their comprehension of each other's theological history. This means that there are no shortcuts, no easy ways out, no painless paths to follow, but only the cross of Christ. Each must study at each other's seminaries (or at least make friends with each other's faculties so a conversation can begin), share bibliographies, visit each other's churches, and spend time together in worship and fellowship. Two traditions which are so vastly different in some ways, yet so closely alike in others, cannot be understood from the inside apart from the sacrificial gifts of time and respect each can give to the other. The dialogue must be that important to people before any real progress can be made to heal the wounds of Christian division.

Given these pressing realities both sides must ask themselves the hard question, 'What is being done in our seminaries and Christian universities to address these vital issues in modern theology and missiology?' The answer is not very heartening. In general, Evangelical seminaries are doing more than the Orthodox seminaries to rectify the imbalance. But while some Evangelical seminaries are beginning to offer a small number of courses on the Orthodox Church, almost no Christian colleges or universities offer even a single introductory class in their history or religion departments. A survey of specific schools will document these general conclusions and give an up-to-date assessment of the current state of the field.

In American Evangelical seminaries we can happily report that over the past decade a small number of courses on the Orthodox Church have been introduced as a new part of the curricula. All such courses are noteworthy since, historically, Evangelical seminaries previously offered them on an 'on demand' basis only. A study of actual course offerings shows that at least one class on the Orthodox tradition has been taught at Fuller Seminary, Southern Baptist Seminary (Louisville, KY), Gordon Conwell Seminary, and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (IL) to name only a few of the better known in the US. Fuller Seminary is especially to be

commended for offering several elective courses by Orthodox adjuncts on 'Eastern Orthodox Theology', 'Eastern Church Fathers', and 'Theology and Spirituality of Icons'. In fact Fuller hired Samuel Gantt who became a full-time Orthodox faculty member for many years. Fr Sam is an Antiochian priest who served as Fuller's Director of Biblical Language Instruction and Instructor in Biblical Languages and was one of the most revered professors among students for over fifteen years. Trinity Divinity School has also offered occasional elective courses in their Mission department on 'Evangelical Missions in Orthodox Lands', 'Eastern Orthodox Theology and Practice' and 'Introduction to the Orthodox Church'. In the UK, London Bible College also offers occasional courses in the field, as does a newly formed Evangelical college in Odessa in the Ukraine under President Sergei Sannikov.

Fuller Seminary has been regarded by some as the 'flagship' school of Evangelicalism as it travelled into the stormy winds of controversy throughout its history, so its relationship with the Orthodox Church deserves special attention for the purpose of this article. To contextualize this relationship an historical summary of key turning points in Fuller's history is in order. Fuller was born out of a controversy which centred in part on the relationship between the gospel and culture. The school was founded with the intention of engaging contemporary culture at all levels with the gospel of Christ, as opposed to the cultural isolationism of separatist Fundamentalists of the 1940s. The next major debate came in the 1970s concerning the inerrancy of the Bible with Fuller taking an essentially errantist position. Then in the 1980s Fuller entered into controversy over the role of women in the church and ended up concluding that the school would actively support the full inclusion of women in ministry. In the 1990s one of the key issues before Fuller now is its attitude toward ecumenism. To what extent will Fuller join itself with other Christian bodies in advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ? Over the course of Fuller's 50-year history the school was already practising a *de facto* type of ecumenism by openly welcoming students from all historic branches of the Christian church. It is this openness which has made it one of the largest interdenominational seminaries in the world today. But what is to be its posture towards the Orthodox? Can it embrace the full inclusion of Orthodox students and professors into its ranks as part of the Evangelical family?

There are three educational alliances which Fuller has attempted to achieve with the Orthodox over the past decade with varying degrees of success and commitment. First, in Fuller's School of Psychology, as noted earlier, family therapist Dr Janice Strength founded a counselling

school in Russia which is named the Moscow Christian School of Psychology. Most of its student body consists of Russian Orthodox Christians and its faculty permits both Orthodox and Evangelical professors.

A second educational ministry is Fuller's extension-type program based in St Petersburg, Russia. Dr James Bradley, the Faculty Co-ordinator for the program, describes its work.

St. Petersburg Theological Academy was founded in 1990 by Dr. Sergei Nikolaev with the support of Dr. Arthur DeKruyter, pastor of Christ Church of Oak Brook, Illinois and Trustee of Fuller Seminary. In consultation with the President and Dean of Fuller Seminary, it was agreed that Fuller would serve in an advisory capacity to the new institution, and that we would send four professors each year to teach intensive, two week courses. From the Spring of 1990 through September 1998, the School of Theology at Fuller has involved fourteen of its own faculty persons (one-third of the School of Theology Faculty) and three graduate students in this project and together they have taught a total of fifty-six courses. Professors normally teach two courses over a period of two weeks with thirty contact hours with students per week.

The experience for the Fuller faculty involved in this endeavour has been uniformly positive and enriching. Participation has enabled School of Theology faculty to experience the church in a cross cultural context.... While our faculty are used to the rich cultural and ethnic diversity of students in Los Angeles, the diversity of backgrounds represented by students from the Russian republics is, of course, even greater. *Good ecumenical relations with the Russian Orthodox Church have been maintained; currently two Orthodox priests serve as adjunct faculty and teach specialised courses at the academy* [emphasis mine].<sup>61</sup>

Under Dr Bradley's leadership, the St Petersburg project is a model for similar co-operative ventures between Orthodox and Evangelical faculties. One cannot help but think that if it can be done successfully in Russia, there is every reason to believe that it should be able to be done successfully anywhere else in the world. But such was not the case in Fuller's own home in America where a third and largest educational alliance with Orthodox regrettably failed.

Fuller's third venture with the Orthodox tested the seriousness of the school's stated mission of church renewal but it proved to require more

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<sup>61</sup> Taken from a report by Bradley addressed to Judith A. Berling, Director, Incarnating Globalization, The Association of Theological Schools, October 3, 1998, p. 1.

from Fuller than it was willing or able to give. It was a landmark proposal in the history of Orthodox-Evangelical relations. In 1995 the Antiochian Orthodox Church in North America (perhaps the most progressive of all Orthodox Churches) initiated contact with Fuller Seminary to propose a joint educational alliance for Orthodox and Evangelical seminarians. Never before in either the history of Evangelicalism or in the history of Orthodoxy had an ecumenical proposal of such magnitude ever been discussed, let alone proposed, by an Orthodox Church, especially one of such great historical distinction as the ancient Patriarchate of Antioch. Fr Michel Najim (a Syriac scholar, Dean of St Nicholas Orthodox Cathedral in Los Angeles and former Dean of St John of Damascus Seminary in Beirut, Lebanon) and myself were appointed as official representatives of the Antiochian Church to Fuller. We worked with and under the direction of Fr Joseph Allen, Chair of the Theological Commission which is overseen by Archbishop Philip Saliba and Bishop Demetri Khouri. The proposal sought to provide a Pan-Orthodox program of studies leading to the Master of Divinity (M. Div.) degree granted by Fuller Seminary in conjunction with the Antiochian House of Studies (a graduate program of St John of Damascus Seminary, Balamand University, Beirut, Lebanon). It was intended to be an ecumenical program with an Orthodox emphasis that would be based in Pasadena but made available to Orthodox and Evangelical students in America and throughout the world by using classical and contemporary methods of theological education (including media technologies over the Internet and Individualised Distance Learning courses). Greek and Russian bishops from the Greek Orthodox Church and Orthodox Church in America agreed to participate as Orthodox professors in the program, and the Coptic Orthodox Church in Los Angeles was in the early stages of discussing their involvement with the Antiochians as well.

As the engineer for the curriculum, I performed several revisions in consultations with both parties involved while seeking to achieve a balance between the theological demands of an authentically Orthodox curriculum and the Evangelical distinctives of Fuller Seminary. The final curriculum appeared to be a unique ecumenical achievement which created an authentic synthesis between our theological traditions without resulting in doctrinal compromise or a theological hybrid. It also offered Fuller's own students the opportunity to study with Orthodox professors at one of the world's largest and most progressive interdenominational Evangelical seminaries. Eastern Orthodox students would have been asked to grapple with the theological emphases of the Reformation, and Evangelical students would have been asked to do the same with Orthodox theology. Both would find

Fuller a safe place to learn each other's history and theology while actually witnessing Christian unity in action for the good of the body of Christ. In this way the joint program would fulfil Fuller's own stated 'Mission Beyond the Mission', a goal dedicated to the renewal of the entire Christian church including the historic 'catholic' traditions such as 'the Orthodox Church' among others.

Despite the numerous prior contacts with Fuller administrators, Fuller's faculty had been given only one introductory opportunity to listen to our proposal and respond. Fr Michel Najim and I presented a general overview of the reasons and goals of the program without reference to the specifics in the curriculum. A few did not feel they could do a responsible job in the area of Orthodox-Evangelical Cupertino since they were already over-committed to other projects. However, others (notably Miroslav Volf who has since moved to Yale) felt the proposal was of enormous significance, were eager to support it, and felt honoured to be involved in such an historic ecumenical moment. Afterwards the Dean and faculty felt they should turn it over to the higher levels of Fuller's administration to move the process forward. A very ambiguous stage in the dialogue ensued between the faculty and administration over whether and how to go ahead with the proposal. Despite many of the faculty's readiness to move ahead with advanced union negotiations, the Dean later provided a written statement to me in which he explained that the administration/Board of Trustees failed to provide the faculty with a clear signal to proceed. Thus an historic program of enormous ecumenical import tragically died.<sup>62</sup> Should George Marsden's book on the history of Fuller Seminary (*Reforming Evangelicalism*) ever be revised in the future, the story of Fuller Seminary ought to include a detailed narrative of this missed opportunity in modern church history.

When turning to an evaluation of Orthodox seminaries that offer courses on Evangelicalism, it is obvious that they are behind their Evangelical counterparts. Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Seminary makes Evangelical courses available to its students through its sister consortium school Gordon-Conwell Seminary. In 1980 a dialogue on preaching was held at the campus of Holy Cross between its faculty and Gordon-Conwell's. The papers were published in the book *God's Living Word*:

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<sup>62</sup> Union negotiations between Fuller and the Antiochian Archdiocese was noted briefly in 'Universities Question Orthodox Conversions', *Christianity Today*, August 11, 1998.

*Orthodox and Evangelical Essays on Preaching*.<sup>63</sup> St Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary (Crestwood, NY) shows verbal signs of interest in Orthodoxy's relationship with Evangelicalism among several of its faculty and students but so far no concrete action has been taken to implement such courses or to engage Evangelicals in academic conversation. Saint Nersus, its sister school from the Armenian Orthodox Church, invited an Armenian Evangelical, Joseph Alexanian from Trinity International University (Deerfield, IL) to teach a course on evangelism in the book of Acts in the summer of 1994. In August 1995 Metropolitan Philip Saliba of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese took a bold step forward to raise seminarians' level of knowledge by offering an annual comparative theology course for his Antiochian students on 'Orthodoxy and American Evangelicalism' in the Antiochian House of Studies (Ligonier, Pennsylvania) taught by the present author.

All of these attempts can only be regarded as progressive. Still, one must be honest enough to regard them only as a good beginning and that not nearly enough is being done to fill in the gaps in our respective curricula. Nevertheless, Evangelical schools are doing more to rectify the situation than are the Orthodox seminaries. And despite Fuller's disappointing setback from the Antiochian proposal noted above, its faculty and administrators remain very supportive in offering courses on the Christian East.

But not all Evangelical schools have had such a constructive relationship with the Orthodox. In the past two years, two schools in particular have gone through some very difficult times when trying to determine what to do with their Orthodox faculty. They are Biola University (La Mirada, California) and Columbia International University (Columbia, South Carolina).

Biola University is a very conservative Evangelical school with a denominationally diverse student body. In 1997-98 three Orthodox employees of the school endured the possibility of termination of contract as a result of a vocal minority of students who portrayed the Orthodox faculty as members of a heretical sect. One professor occupied the chair of a highly successful R. A. Torrey Honours Program, another professor was head of the Art Department and the third an ordained Orthodox priest who served as the Dean of Students. By all accounts, including Biola's students and administration, each performed their jobs with honourable distinction. In the name of academic freedom, the vocal minority of students were

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<sup>63</sup> *God's Living Word: Orthodox and Evangelical Essays on Preaching*, ed. Theodore Stylianopoulos (Brookline, 1983).



allowed to express their views but took advantage of their privileges and soon became disruptive to the professors and institutional life of the school. The students increased the tension by posting anti-Orthodox messages throughout the school and, to put it lightly, generally demeaned the Orthodox Church. As a result, a theological commission of three was set up from the school's adjacent Talbot School of Theology to write a report on Eastern Orthodox theology and its compatibility with Biola's Statement of Faith. If the two were compatible the professors could remain at the school; if not, they would have to leave. To help facilitate the dialogue, two outside Orthodox theologians were invited to Biola for an evening's discussion with the members of Talbot's theological commission. After meeting for several hours the Provost, who moderated the discussion, concluded that there were no major breaches with Biola's Statement of Faith and that the Orthodox professors could remain in their jobs.<sup>64</sup> The face-to-face dialogue between Orthodox and Evangelical theologians which occurred at Biola University is a commendable model of true Christian understanding which should serve the rest of the Evangelical community with a standard to emulate.

A similar incident of an Evangelical backlash against Orthodoxy occurred at another conservative school but not with the same positive results. One of the mission professors at Columbia International University, Dr Edward Rommen, joined the faculty after serving as a tenured professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Deerfield, IL). Rommen grew up in the Evangelical Free Church and spent 14 years as a missionary and seminary professor of that denomination in Germany. He possesses a doctorate in Theology and Missions and studied with Wolfhart Pannenberg at Munich, Germany. His most recent book was co-authored with David Hesselgrave, and is entitled, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods and Models*. After many years of studying and searching for a deeper church life, in 1997 Rommen left the Evangelical Free Church denomination and joined the Orthodox Church. As a result of his conversion, he was almost immediately asked to resign from his new teaching post at Columbia International University in 1998. While the majority of professors and administrators seemed to support Rommen, two or three top administrators appear to have engineered a quiet dismissal. He is now an ordained Orthodox Deacon working for a construction company while looking for another teaching post at a university or seminary.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Reported in 'Universities Question Orthodox Conversions', *Christianity Today* (August 11, 1998), pp. 21-3.

<sup>65</sup> As reported in *Christianity Today*, *ibid.*

Another example of a more quiet form of an Evangelical reaction against Orthodoxy can be seen in the case of Wheaton College. Here one needs to distinguish between Wheaton's *public* Statement of Faith and its *private* stance against the Orthodox. There is nothing in Wheaton's Statement of Faith which any Orthodox theologian could not sign. What Wheaton hopes for, however, is that such theologians would object to what is not contained in it (e.g. the 'real presence' of Christ in the Eucharist). According to Robert Weber, Wheaton operates on a rule of thumb that only Protestants can speak in chapel or be hired as faculty members. However, this is only an 'oral' tradition among most (not all) of the faculty, not a 'written' prohibition.<sup>66</sup> Such a posture, however, is curious in light of the fact that Weber himself is an Episcopalian, which is nearly identical with the Orthodox tradition barring differences over the *filioque* clause in the Nicene Creed and a few other similar technicalities which are not vital for faculty signatures at Wheaton. Also there are more Episcopal students attending Wheaton College than at any other time in the school's history. Another irony lies in the contradictory message one hears when a renowned Orthodox speaker is asked to grace the christening of one of Evangelicalism's most distinguished institutions. During the 1980s the renowned Orthodox philosopher, educator and theologian, Charles Malik, was invited to give the prestigious dedication speech for the new Billy Graham Centre which is located on the campus of Wheaton College. The late Charles Malik was a theologian of the Antiochian Orthodox Church in Lebanon and the United States, a founding member in the United Nations, a member of the Board of Trustees of Harvard University, and personal friend of Carl Henry and Bill Bright. Though the Billy Graham Centre is functionally distinct from Wheaton College, Wheaton wholeheartedly embraced the honour of Malik's presence. One can only humbly pray for the day when Wheaton and other fine schools like it will welcome Orthodox theologians of the calibre of Charles Malik into their Evangelical ranks with full faculty status as valued brothers in Christ.

In sum, the presence or potential of Orthodox faculty in Evangelical schools has begun to challenge the adequacy of public Evangelical Statements of Faith and privately held faculty opinions. The Statements of Faith were often forged as an historical reaction against Tridentine Roman Catholicism and the once rising tide of Protestant liberalism. Orthodoxy was not even on the radar screen of Evangelical schools at the time of

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<sup>66</sup> Phone conversation with Robert Weber, December 21, 1999. Weber referred me to Wheaton's President, Duane Litfin, for confirmation but he was unavailable for comment.

drafting their statements. Today, Evangelicals in America are having to re-evaluate their identity in light of their relationship with Orthodoxy on an 'as needed' basis. There is not a large movement in this direction but the problems outlined above reveal that the Orthodox Church in America is indeed having a discernible impact on Evangelical schools, and that such schools are struggling to understand the true identity of Orthodoxy as well as their own Evangelical identity in light of that discovery. Oftentimes their understanding of the Orthodox Church is mediated simply through introductory books which do not adequately deal with Evangelical questions, through conversations with theologically unsophisticated Orthodox leaders, or through fellow Evangelical professors who themselves have only a superficial knowledge of the Church's tradition. Few Orthodox or Evangelical scholars are able to speak each other's language fluently or build bridges based on an authentic grasp of each other's theological history. This adversely impacts the private opinions of Evangelical faculty members who are at the helm of the hiring process when reviewing job applicants of Orthodox scholars. Often Evangelical faculties do not currently possess the conceptual categories in which to fit the Orthodox as they appear as neither fish nor fowl. However as more of the younger generation of Evangelical scholars complete doctoral degrees in Greek patristics, liturgical studies and Byzantine/modern history the Evangelical institutions which hire them may become increasingly open to acquiring the rich intellectual resources of Orthodox faculty members in the coming decades.

## **Conclusion**

The sum of these developments demonstrate that we are only at the start of an emerging global dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox and Evangelical communities. The Orthodox tradition is fast becoming a vital issue in modern theology and world missions. An unprecedented opportunity for growth, reconstruction and renewal now lies before us. Evangelical seminaries that have the foresight to develop curricular emphases in Eastern Christianity will be better able to offer a fuller perspective on global theology and thus will be on the cutting edge of the future of theological education. Orthodox seminaries must do the same with Evangelicalism. While the fledgling dialogue is fraught with potentially fatal hazards, it is my conviction that if our relationship is patiently nurtured with humility, courage, determination and the laying aside of personal and ecclesial pride it may well turn out to be one of the most

fruitful and significant ecumenical encounters of all at the beginning of the third millennium.

A renowned British Byzantinologist said that the twenty-first century will be the century of the Orthodox. This should not make the Orthodox boast but rather it should make us feel more strongly the immense responsibility placed on our weak shoulders to witness to the Church's faith with great humility. The theological treasures of Byzantium are just beginning to be discovered by Colin Gunton's re-appropriation of classical Byzantine Christology, and Miroslav Volf's and Thomas Torrance's work on Cappadocian Trinitarian theology, to name just a few of the better known Evangelicals. It must also be said as it so often happens in Protestant encounters with Orthodoxy, that Evangelicals may well end up feeling disappointed with the quality of their conversation with some contemporary Orthodox dialogue partners, many of whom have an unsophisticated lack of appreciation for the theological emphases of the Reformers and their children. But it is precisely at that moment of disillusionment, when Evangelicals will be tempted to turn away from the Orthodox, that Evangelicals must summon the intellectual courage to move beyond the sins and weaknesses of modern Orthodoxy and go back to the primary sources themselves which have formed the Church's faith, no matter how much or how little the modern Orthodox are able to help them with the journey. Evangelicals will need to develop a strategy for dealing with the poor external conditions of contemporary Orthodoxy – conditions which are partly due to a legacy of Islamic and Communist domination over the Orthodox as well as plain religious snobbery and the lack of desire to understand the Christian West. If Alister McGrath is correct in asserting that Evangelicalism will become the most viable theological option on the religious landscape in the coming years,<sup>67</sup> I humbly believe that Eastern Orthodoxy, despite its human frailties and current weaknesses, may very well end up as the dialogue partner which can offer Evangelicals the greatest abundance of fresh theological resources to nourish its ongoing maturity and creative relevance throughout the twenty-first century.

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<sup>67</sup> Alister McGrath, *The Future of Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, 1997).