

Ken Guindon has written a well-documented account of his theological foray into the liturgical churches that is both relevant and insightful. His impeccable scholarship and convincing argumentation demands the attention of everyone enamored with Catholicism or Orthodoxy. This is a book that needed to be written, and we should be grateful that one so competent and intelligent has done just that.

More than a mental exercise or academic investigation, the substance of this book stems from the crucible of personal experience. Sharing personal lessons from his cross-cultural immersion into sacerdotalism, he attacks no straw men, but carefully and candidly documents ecclesiastical distinctions long recognized, but frequently overlooked.

Like David returning from the Philistines, the author has returned to the evangelical fold with a greater appreciation of the gospel. More pioneer than prodigal, the author “came to his senses” with a reaffirmation of faith that is both inspiring and sobering. We welcome him back with honor and kudos for a sensitive critique of Orthodoxy and Catholicism that is both transparent and courageous.

—Stephen Brown
Professor of Bible and History,
Shasta Bible College and Graduate School

Because of a number of recent accounts of evangelicals joining the Roman Catholic or the Eastern Orthodox Church, this is an important and much-needed book. Through the examination of church history, theology and Scripture, Ken Guindon shares his spiritual journey and explains why he returned to evangelical Christianity. His study is fair-minded and well-written, and provides a sound defense for his decision.

—Edmond C. Gruss,
Professor Emeritus, The Master’s College

This is a very pertinent book for our time when many prize church history and personal experience above Biblical truth in their search for spiritual vitality. Like many today who find a shallowness of doctrine and life in many contemporary evangelical churches, the author tells of his search for genuine Christianity in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches whose ancient roots are said to signal authentic Christianity. Although acknowledging enjoyable aspects of the worship atmosphere and recognizing the presence of godly believers, the author explains why these churches did not satisfy his search. Utilizing church history and Biblical theology, many teachings and practices of the Orthodox and Catholic

churches are shown to be foreign to the New Testament and contrary to the complete graciousness of salvation—many of them having arisen much later in accommodation to surrounding influences. Written with a loving heart, this work is worth reading by everyone interested in authentic Christianity and is particularly helpful for anyone who is tempted to think that age and claims to infallibility are criteria of the true church.

—Robert L. Saucy
Former Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology,
Talbot School of Theology

The author describes his goal in writing this tome as twofold: to explain why evangelicals are leaving their faith for “highly ceremonial worship,” even adopting contrary doctrines to do so; and to “present a short ‘apologia’ for biblical faith.” That is a worthy aim, and the author does a good job reaching his objective, with the book divided pretty well into his double theme—the latter taking a slight edge. His “unrelenting goal is to help outsiders to grasp the issues that are leading evangelicals to become members of these ancient churches.” He correctly notes, “A person’s way of life will be based upon one of two clear-cut principles: either the Word of God or the word of men.” Tradition clearly falls into the latter category.

Guindon sums up succinctly, based on his own experience, why evangelicals are attracted to Roman and Orthodox bodies, offering four positives and two negatives. His chapters on baptism, worship, and sacerdotalism were especially good, we thought. He is convinced one of the major problems in all this relates to confusion between salvation and sanctification. And we liked his observation that someone said, “The Protestant trusts Christ to save him; the Catholic [or Orthodox] trusts Christ to help him save himself.” We have always felt this to be true.

Guindon’s own summary of his work is, “One faith is the true faith and has no temples, no priests, no material sacrifices. God saves us and our works add nothing to His work.”

We were very impressed with this careful, scholarly work. *High Church Heresy* is a good book deserving a wide circulation. It is a delight to endorse it.

—Robert L. Sumner
Editor, *The Biblical Evangelist*

HIGH CHURCH HERESY

Exposing **Resurgent**
Catholicism and Orthodoxy

KENNETH R. GUINDON



Regular Baptist Books
Arlington Heights, Illinois

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High Church Heresy: Exposing Resurgent Catholicism and Orthodoxy

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Dedication

To the memory of Dr. Harold L. Fickett Jr., former pastor of First Baptist Church, Van Nuys, California, for his confidence, trust, and mentoring, and to the memory of Major Ian Thomas of England, founder of the Capernwray Missionary Fellowship of Torchbearers. And to a longtime witness of my spiritual journey, Dr. Edmond C. Gruss of Newhall, California, who still takes time to listen and give encouragement.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to Dr. David Nicholas of Redding, California, who suggested I write this book and then took time from his busy schedule as president of Shasta Bible College and Graduate School to write the foreword. My thanks to Dr. Edmond C. Gruss, who encouraged me in my writing. To all those who read the manuscript and offered advice, such as Tim Knickerbocker and Larry McDonald, I remain indebted.

For all who graciously endorsed my book, I beg the Lord of Glory to bless them and their families. None of them are responsible for any weaknesses or errors. I accept full responsibility for the opinions expressed herein.

I thank God most of all for my wife, Monique, who ministers faithfully to me in innumerable ways and has enabled me to devote time to my studies and writing.

Foreword

IN A DAY WHEN SO MANY EVANGELICALS are attracted to and intrigued by the liturgy, formality, and ritual of Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, Ken Guindon has done Biblical Christianity an incredible service. Saved and disciplined in an evangelical church, his sincere but misguided quest for authentic Christianity led him on a nineteen-year pilgrimage into the theological depths of both Orthodoxy and Catholicism. Thankfully, he has returned to *sola scriptura*, convinced that ultimate truth is found only in God's infallible, inerrant Word. God has now enabled and equipped him to focus the light of Scripture on the historical influences and the incremental changes that moved the simplicity of early Christian worship and practice toward a legalistic hierarchy and the sacramental practices that today characterize both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches.

An understanding of the history and heritage of authentic Biblical Christianity has always been important throughout the history of the church. Today, however, such an understanding is not only important, but mandatory. Winds of change and pragmatism are now sweeping across the fundamental/evangelical landscape. Coupled with the surrounding cultural influences of ethical relativism, situation ethics, and the deliberate deconstruction of our moral and ethical values by the secular progressives, these winds of change have sent many sincere believers on a frantic search for either relevance or some kind of historic spiritual security.

Some say the answer is found in making the gospel more palatable to unbelievers and Christ less offensive to the culture. This is the cry

of the so-called seeker sensitive movement, which seems to overlook the apostle Paul's inspired observation in Romans 3:11, "There is none that seeketh after God." Also ignored is the "offence of the cross" (Gal. 5:11; 1 Pet. 2:7, 8) and Paul's axiom that "the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18). Thus, the mention of sin and its spiritual consequences, they say, must be minimized, and those who are too outspoken in their condemnation of lifestyles and religious beliefs contrary to Biblical precepts and principles, marginalized. The heritage of past spiritual blessing must be erased and eradicated to make way for new approaches to doing church that will help us to finally get orthodoxy right. As Brian McLaren, a leading spokesperson for the Emerging Church movement, recently stated in *Christianity Today*, "I don't think we've got the gospel right yet. . . . I don't think the liberals have it right. But I don't think we have it right either. None of us has arrived at orthodoxy." John MacArthur, in his book *The Truth War*, identifies the problem well: "In the Emerging Church movement, truth (to whatever degree such a concept is even recognized) is assumed to be inherently hazy, indistinct, and uncertain—perhaps even ultimately unknowable."

Others, longing for the security of the past, have decided to return to the "orthodoxy" of either Roman Catholicism or the Eastern Orthodox Church. Surprisingly, an increasing number of former evangelicals have embraced the writings of the church fathers, the tradition of the church, and in some cases even the apocryphal books as tantamount in importance to the inspired, inerrant Word of God canonized in Holy Scripture. They somehow long for the liturgy and legalism, the smell of incense, the sacraments and the "security" that comes from returning to the "mother church." To them, God's inspired, inerrant Word is not enough, and they seem to overlook all the implications of 2 Timothy 3:16 where Paul tells us that all Scripture is inspired by God (God-breathed) and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

For them, Scripture is not enough. It is not sufficient. They want the mediating services of the priest, although 1 Timothy 2:5 instructs, “There is . . . one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” They want to revel in sacerdotalism, confining God in bread and wine, keeping Him in a gilded box, or holding Him up in a monstrance for adoration despite the fact that Scripture clearly states in Acts 17:24 and 25, “[The] God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing.” All this goes along with praying to Mary and the saints, works-based salvation, and adherence to the syncretistic canons of the church, which historically have blended Christianity with pagan religious practices, producing a composite religion with which all can identify, to the point of even recognizing the Islamic religion as legitimate.

This book deserves the attention of all Bible-believing Christians, not just evangelical scholars. It not only explains why evangelicals are attracted to both Orthodoxy and Catholicism but it speaks the truth in love concerning the heresies and even apostate beliefs inherent within these two religious systems. Ken Guindon is uniquely equipped to expose the subtlety of sacramentalism, the lure of liturgy and legalism, the perniciousness of pragmatism, the peril of praying to the saints, the mistakes and misunderstandings of Mariolatry, the ritual of the Rosary, the ineffectiveness of infant baptism, the truth about tradition, and the sabotage of salvation by both Roman Catholicism and the Eastern Orthodox Church by the addition of works to the clear teaching of Scripture that salvation is by grace through faith alone (Rom. 3:27, 28).

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Introduction

FOR THE LAST FIFTY YEARS OR SO, a new drumbeat has been heard in the West. Evangelicals¹ have been joining either the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, or some other formalistic liturgical church. Thomas Howard (after a stint with Anglicanism) chose Roman Catholicism and later wrote a book with the striking title *Evangelical Is Not Enough*. Former Presbyterian Pastor Scott Hahn, a professor at Franciscan University of Steubenville in Ohio, can be seen on EWTN, a Roman Catholic television network. Also on EWTN is former Presbyterian minister Marcus Grodi, with his *The Journey Home* TV program and his ministry to help evangelical ministers considering joining the Catholic church. The latest surprise has been the “return” of Frank Beckwith, president (2007) of the Evangelical Theological Society, to the Roman Catholic Church of his youth. On the Eastern Orthodox² side of the equation one finds Frank Schaeffer, the son of Presbyterian theologian and philosopher Francis Schaeffer; Peter Gillquist; Gordon Walker; Jack Sparks; and their companions who were key people in Campus Crusade for Christ. A number of the latter are now Orthodox priests. Many of those marching eastward were once Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, or Pentecostal ministers. Their spiritual journeys have already been told in books and magazines, so it is pointless to detail them here. The following pages present an analysis of the reasons for such conversions to ancient liturgical churches and then my own “Journey Home” back to the evangelical

1. The term “evangelical” as used in this book refers to a born-again Christian who believes the Bible to be the inspired Word of God. Due to a lot of confusion today, “evangelical” has come to mean almost anyone who attends any kind of “Christian” church. We do not address the latter meaning here.

2. Throughout this book, the term “Orthodox” will refer to those churches popularly known as “Eastern Orthodox.”

faith. This book should definitely strengthen your personal faith in Jesus Christ, Who saves us completely by grace through faith. Christian pastors and counselors will also discover helpful chapters with information on historical questions, the church fathers, repetitive prayer, the worship of images, and sacramentalism.

In recent decades a definite trend toward *churchianity* has developed within evangelical churches, moving even toward Eastern practices like meditation and yoga. The use of candles, robes, and repetitious responses is seen more frequently in American churches today. New thinking, new methods, and new names such as “missional church” or “emergent church” seek to renew the church’s focus. This trend is often a sign of a more cosmetic activism, marking a return to forms of worship as seen in ancient temples and religions. We are seeing a return to pre-Reformation times, when huge cathedrals were packed with people who superstitiously sought salvation in the practice of sacraments, the worship of saints, and the purchase of indulgences to shorten their time in purgatory. Those poor people simply trusted the faith they had inherited from their fathers.

The Pope Mobile and Pope Appeal

The resurgence of the traditional faiths can be seen in recent World Youth Day celebrations, held yearly by international and American Catholic dioceses. World Youth Day was instituted by Pope John Paul II in 1985 and first held in 1986. In 1995, the closing Mass in the Philippines set a world record, with five million in attendance. Pope Francis broke that record in 2015 with six million in attendance in Brazil. These huge gatherings have been held in Vatican City, Rome, Argentina, Brazil, Australia, Spain, Poland, France, the USA, and Canada, inspiring a resurgence of Catholicism. Many are boarding the “pope mobile” and Catholic bandwagon to join the parade. Parish signs and TV ads have held a Catholic “come home” campaign to urge former Catholics to return to their church.

In the meantime, popes, patriarchs, and bishops are frequently seen on television as they issue statements on fraternal relations with Muslims, Jews, and Protestants, and issue documents detailing the need for ecological care of Earth’s resources. These leaders meet together in

Jerusalem and elsewhere, appealing for world peace.

And the pope's appeal is on the rise. Pope Francis, the latest pope, endeavors to live modestly in a small apartment. He speaks out on women's rights, divorce, and homosexuality, gaining the attention of university students as well as social media. Popes and bishops now have their own blogs, Facebook pages, and Twitter accounts. They are shaking off the opinion people formerly held that they were old-fashioned and deserved to be marginalized. Youth are taking notice to some extent, and many former Catholics are returning to the church of their parents as a possible source of stability and peace in troubled times.

Magnetic Pull

The Orthodox (OC) and Roman Catholic (RCC) Churches contend that they have faithfully preserved the apostolic faith as taught in both the Scriptures and tradition. Their apologists reference the church fathers in support of their teachings on the Eucharist and baptism. Due to a growing uneasiness with denominationalism and the arbitrariness of so many pastors, people are seeking the "true" church Christ organized around His twelve apostles.

Faced with the conflicting opinions of so many churches and denominations, people today might surmise that they can find faithful guides to Christ's teachings in the apostolic fathers. After all, were they not the apostles' direct spiritual successors? Having received the promise of the Holy Spirit, would not Christ's church accurately preserve and transmit the deposit of faith? Was not the noted Anglican patristic scholar J. N. D. Kelly to be trusted when he wrote,

In the eyes of both of them [Cyril and Theodoret] the authority of the Fathers consisted precisely in the fact that they had so faithfully and fully expounded the real intention of the Bible writers. What they found impressive was that so many famous and saintly teachers, venerated in the whole Church were unanimous in their interpretation of Scripture and in their statement of the doctrines set forth, or at any rate implied, in it.³

3. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 2nd ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1960, 1978; San Francisco:

In my own search for the visible church of Christ, such reasoning led me to leave the safe harbor of the Scriptures for the stormy waters of church history.

In 1986, I read Dr. Nicolas Wiseman's *Conférences sur les doctrines et les pratiques les plus importantes de l'Eglise Catholique*.⁴ I began to think that the church fathers and church councils should be trusted. I asked myself, did Christians as far back as Justin Martyr and Ignatius look at the bread and wine as types⁵ or symbols, that is, as a simple memorial of Christ's death on the cross? Or did they believe that the bread and the wine were transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ during the liturgy? On the other hand, could it be that these early apologists were unduly influenced by their background and their cultural environment (Platonism, Hellenism, or Judaism)? As immediate successors to the apostles, did they faithfully transmit Christ's teachings like a sacred treasure to be protected? Did they believe that regeneration took place in the baptismal waters? It appeared that they did, and this led me to believe that the Roman Catholic Church was founded by our Lord Jesus Christ. At that moment I knew practically nothing about the Orthodox Church, so it was not an option.

Another question occupied my mind at that point: What happened to Christianity during the twenty to fifty years after the apostles established churches in the Diaspora? My reading in the church fathers gradually led me to the conviction that the Catholic church may have grown out of the apostolic church, like an acorn becoming an oak tree. Did a Judaizing spirit permeate the atmosphere in which the newly founded Christian churches (*ecclesias*) were established? Did the insidious gnostic currents of the Mediterranean basin inspire monasticism? What about platonic and neo-Platonic ideas everywhere in vogue?

Prince Press edition, 2003), 49. Citations refer to the Prince Press edition.

4. Nicolas Wiseman, *Conférences sur les doctrines et les pratiques les plus importantes de l'Eglise Catholique*, trans. Alfred Nettement (Paris: Beaujouan et Jourdan, 1839). Dr. Wiseman was also a cardinal in the Catholic church. The spine of the book has the intriguing title *Conférences sur le Protestantisme* ["Conferences on Protestantism"] stamped on it. This is what motivated my purchase from a used-book store in Perpignan, France, where I was living at the time.

5. Of realities in Heaven (reminiscent of Platonism).

Did these affect the development of Christian theology or spirituality in any way? How can one account for the evident differences between primitive Christianity with its simple style of worship and the elaborate ceremonies of the post-Nicene period?

The ancient churches (RCC, OC) proudly argue from history and practice (tradition), citing the fathers from the second century onward. Should we accept such authorities as compatible with the gospel found in the Word of God? What about our Lord's warning in the Parable of the Sower? Jesus said that while the sower slept, the enemy would come and sow the field with weeds (Matt. 13). The separation of the tares, or weeds, from the true wheat will take place at the end of the age when the sower (Christ) returns for the harvest. These tares would begin to appear as early as the apostles' days, according to Paul's prediction in Acts 20:28 and 29: "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock" (HCSB).

The apostle Paul warned the church at Thessalonica that the apostasy was not just on the horizon; it was already raising its ugly head: "For the mystery of lawlessness *is already* at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way" (2 Thess. 2:7, italics added). To Timothy, his child in the faith, Paul prophesied, "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:3, 4).

The Assurance of the Gospel

This book attempts to answer several questions: Should Christians look to the church fathers, to the Scriptures alone, or to both as sure guides when considering sacramentalism and salvation? Does the Orthodox Church really teach that ecclesiastical rules and observances must be obeyed for one to be a faithful Christian? Consequently, have the ancient churches confused salvation and sanctification? Most importantly, do these practices and church rules undermine the authentic Christian

gospel? Do these ancient churches teach that salvation is *in* and *through* the church? Another important but subsidiary question is, What is worship, and in reality is there a difference between the worship offered to God and that offered to saints? My goal is to provide church leaders, pastors, evangelists, and interested laypeople with a handy reference book on this timely topic.

I quote the church fathers, but not because I consider any of them to be an infallible guide to a correct interpretation of Scripture. One may find the church fathers informative at times, but no one should overemphasize them. A Christian trusts the triune God, Who speaks through His Word found in the canon of the inspired Holy Scriptures. But over time, apostolic teaching began to be interpreted in new ways, and the church fathers, as well as the ecumenical councils, came to be considered by many as *infallible*.

All the possible questions and issues that come to mind in a review of the Scriptures and the church fathers cannot be addressed here, so my goal is twofold: (1) to make people aware of the reasons some evangelicals have opted out of Protestant churches for a more ceremonial worship and have adopted doctrines contrary to evangelical teaching, and (2) to present an *apologia* for a Biblical faith.

The subject matter obliges us to look at church history, patristics, and exegesis of the Holy Scriptures because it is important for evangelicals to understand why people are attracted to either the Catholic or the Orthodox faith. How many of these converts revert later in life to the evangelical faith? Certain individuals may be tempted to consider this book an attack upon their cherished beliefs, but that would be a mistake. My sole purpose is to lay before the public the Scriptural and historical reasons for my return to a truly Biblical faith. Love for Christ and His message motivates my writing. I do not wish to criticize or denigrate anyone because I have chosen to examine his church's teachings. I do love and appreciate my Catholic and Orthodox friends. Thousands of Orthodox believers preferred martyrdom under the Islamic yoke rather than renounce the name of Christ for Muhammad. Both Catholics and Orthodox have founded important charitable works, such as orphanages

and hospitals, at home and abroad; such zeal for Christ and neighbor is worthy of respect.

I have spent much of the last fifteen years reading, meditating, and reflecting on my spiritual experience in Orthodoxy. Uneasiness and dissatisfaction constantly afflicted me, causing me to remember when I was truly “resting in Christ” (Matt. 11:28–30; Heb. 4:3). On September 23, 2001, having witnessed a TV broadcast of the massive interfaith service held at Yankee Stadium in New York City to commemorate the events of 9/11, I was shocked to see the participation of Archbishop Demetrios of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese (benediction prayer) and to note the attendance of my own metropolitan and head of the Orthodox Church in America (Theodosius). Why this concern? Because the canons of the Orthodox Church prohibit Orthodox clergy from participating in joint prayers with other religions. The Orthodox Church sees itself as unique, *the Lord’s Body*. That day in September saw Baptists, Catholics, Orthodox, Sikhs, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, and Muslims praying together for our country. The visual effect communicated that all religions are equal and that people worship the same God because there is only one God. This led me to break communion with my priest, parish, and church and to move to Florida to support a fiercely anti-ecumenical (old calendarist⁶) Orthodox Church with a very small presence in our country. Still, I did not find peace of mind or heart. I had been reading the Bible, and something constantly nagged and pulled at me. For a short time I visited several evangelical churches but did not feel at home there as I once had. Eventually, I returned to the Orthodox Church and became a member of the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia (known also by the acronym ROCOR, a fairly anti-ecumenical group, present in many countries). I thought I had found a shelter and resting place for my wife and me.

6. Today’s Orthodox Churches are divided into “Old Calendarists,” who follow the Julian calendar, and “New Calendarists,” who follow the Gregorian calendar, which they like to call the “Revised Julian Calendar.” Ecumenism and the church calendar have been the cause of a lot of dissension in the Orthodox Church, some groups breaking away from the main bodies. The place of the Oriental Orthodox Churches is another issue and is the result of a schism dating back to the fourth century. These churches are not under consideration here.

The Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches share similar ideas on the sacraments and salvation, although some differences do exist. During the last thirty years or so, representatives from these churches have been meeting to discuss issues such as the addition to the Creed by Roman Catholics of the *filioque* clause, baptism, and the role of the pope. The Western (Roman) and the Eastern (Orthodox) churches are agreeing that they share the same priesthood and sacraments. (Many Orthodox reject this; nevertheless, it is widely admitted today.) A great many Orthodox clergymen consider other churches to be either schismatic and/or heretical. However, these issues do not concern us here.

Self-justification has no real value, and I am writing only to make others aware that I have chosen to stand on the same ground as the apostle Paul: God is “the justifier of the one who has faith” (Rom. 3:26). Having been an active member of the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches for about twenty-five of my adult years, I believe I understand their belief systems well enough to compare them fairly with the faith taught in the Holy Scriptures. These pages will answer numerous questions concerning the ancient churches and the reasons they draw so many evangelicals into their fold.

Throughout this book I have endeavored to maintain the primacy of Scripture. The so-called church fathers *never* claimed infallibility for their writings. It may seem logical to suppose that the earliest witnesses to the apostolic faith would be more trustworthy witnesses than those who succeeded them centuries later, but that may not be the case as we shall see later. But keep in mind, Christ promised us that the gates of Hell would not prevail against His church!

PART 1

Tradition, Scripture, and the Church Fathers

EVERYONE IS FAMILIAR with the request to “please put that in writing.” It is considered the best way to avoid misunderstandings that arise when memories have dimmed. Similarly, contracts, deeds, and wills are recorded and notarized to avoid long contests in court. The Bible, too, is a written document, even, one might say, a contract that has been confirmed and notarized by God’s Son, Jesus Christ. Although the prophets of both Testaments said much that is not recorded in the Bible, in the written Word we have all the essential and necessary truths for our salvation (1 Pet. 1:10–12, 23; 2:2). So in matters that involve our faith, our fellowship with God, and our fellowman, should not God’s written Word take precedence?

Numerous teachings of the ancient churches are not found in the Word of God. People are not saved by a knowledge of church traditions such as purgatory, the immaculate conception of Mary, papal infallibility, or fasting for a certain number of days and hours before taking Communion, but they are saved by means of the gospel message that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world (John 4:42). The purpose of Scripture is to provide the history of salvation from creation to the Second Coming of Christ and the accomplishment of God’s purposes. Tradition does not add anything of importance to the content of the gospel. People will be saved without knowing whether Jesus had brothers and sisters or whether Peter was the head of the apostolic band and the first pope.

The Old Testament was the Bible of the apostolic church, and its members scrutinized it for types and prophecies of the Messiah. They found in the New Testament about three hundred Old Testament references and allusions. And the Holy Spirit led them to find the true meaning of the Torah and other parts of the Old Testament that predicted the Messiah (Luke 24:25–27; 2 Cor. 3:14–16; Rev. 19:10). Can we say that like the Bible, Tradition¹ is a two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12)? Is Tradition inspired? If the answer is no, why do some people fight to hold onto Tradition or traditions? The apostle Paul tells us that all Scripture is inspired, that is, God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16). The book of Revelation in particular informs us that it is “the testimony of Jesus” and “the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 12:17; 19:10; 14:12). Who can say this about traditions, since they are based on people’s memories and stories?

Issues of Authority

What is the definitive and final authority in Christ’s church? This question, along with what is the means of salvation, takes precedence over every other point of controversy. Roman Catholic and Orthodox church members trust their church leadership for guidance, for constituting the definitive and final authority.

Some in the church, however, questioned that authority. They wanted to purge the church of its extra-Biblical superstitions (traditions). Saints, purgatory, penances, and indulgences weighed heavily upon people and kept the simple multitudes from experiencing the peace that comes from knowing Jesus Christ as Savior and mediator. Thus the Reformation was born. The Reformers did not, however, envision building another church, but thought only of cleansing the one into which they had been born. Reformation preachers invited men and women to focus on Christ, His grace, and the Scriptures alone (therefore the five “solas”²). Their struggle brought many benefits, but

1. “Tradition” is generally capitalized in this book when it refers to a source of dogma received in the ancient churches.

2. The five solas are *sola scriptura*, “Scripture alone”; *sola fide*, “faith alone”; *sola gratia*, “grace alone”; *solo Christo*, “Christ alone”; *soli Deo Gloria*, “to the glory of God alone.”

it also produced its own problems. While preachers sought to instruct the masses in the truths of Scripture, the focus moved away from worship and to the preacher and preaching. Worship became limited to the singing of psalms and hymns and listening to the best preacher a church could secure; in a word, worship became mostly an intellectual experience.³

To grapple with the issues that lead evangelicals to become members of ancient churches, the relationship between Tradition and Scripture remains critical. Are they both equally reliable sources for Christian faith? Evangelicals also need to come to grips with the “church fathers.” How should we evaluate them in relation to the Holy Scriptures?

The Word *Tradition* in the New Testament

What do the Scriptures teach about tradition, and what do the ancient liturgical churches teach on the subject? *Parádoxis* is the Greek noun generally translated “tradition” or “traditions” in our Bibles. It basically means “to hand down” or “hand over,” “to transmit.” By extrapolation it may refer to doctrine or teaching. Interestingly, the Darby Version, which is a very literal translation, says “doctrines” at Galatians 1:14, with a footnote reading “traditions.” We know that the oral preaching of the gospel was eventually committed to writing. The apostle Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, refers to his gospel preaching concerning Christ, “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved. . . . For I delivered [*paradidomai*] to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (15:1–3). We also have his oral teaching (“the traditions,” HCSB) on the Lord’s Supper written down: “Now I praise you because you remember me in all things and keep the traditions [KJV, “ordinances”] just as

3. R. C. Sproul, *A Taste of Heaven* (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2006), 20, 150. Dr. Sproul comments on page 150, “When God prescribed worship in the Old Testament, the whole person was involved.” See also Joseph A. Pipa Jr., ed. *The Worship of God* (Taylors, SC: Mentor, 2005), 36–37, and chapter 9 in Michael Horton’s *A Better Way* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 158–59.

I delivered them to you” (1 Cor. 11:2, HCSB). Interestingly, *parádosis* occurs twice here: once as a noun and once as a verb.

Another positive reference is 2 Thessalonians 2:15: “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle” (cf. 3:6). We believe that there can be no difference between Paul’s “word” and his “epistle.” *Parádosis* occurs in thirteen New Testament verses. Eight of these occurrences are found in a negative context in the Gospels, where Jesus condemned the Jews who preferred their traditions to the spiritual and sincere practice of Judaism. Knowing how much weight both the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox churches place on Tradition, we would expect to find more positive references than the few we have in the New Testament. Scriptural support for the ancient churches’ reliance on Tradition appears to be rather slim, if it exists at all.

In 1 Peter 1:18, “tradition” is compounded with another word and translated as “tradition from your fathers.” Albert Barnes commented on this phrase: “*Received by tradition from your fathers.* The mode of worship which had been handed down from father to son. The worship of idols depends on no better reason than that it is that which has been practised in ancient times; and it is kept up now in all lands, in a great degree, only by the fact that it has had the sanction of the venerated men of other generations.”⁴ Since images were honored as representatives of gods, not always as the gods themselves, these statements would apply to any discussion about image worship (see chapter 9).

Tradition should always be examined to determine whether it is in harmony with God’s commandments.

Issues of Authority Lead to Evangelical Conversions to Orthodoxy

Originally Protestants separated from the Roman church mainly because of the defective teaching in the medieval church, but also

4. Albert Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament*, ed. Ingram Cobbin (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1962), 1403.

because of the low moral life of many clergymen. Still, the issue of what constitutes the final authority for God's people was uppermost in all the intramural debates. The two ways of looking at the differences have been succinctly summarized in *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, edited by the famous Jesuit Karl Rahner: "God could have addressed the Word of his revelation to individuals independently of any human community or authority. This was the idea of the Reformers. But he could also have *entrusted his truth to a human community* and set up a responsible guardian for its presentation. This is what Christ did."⁵

This is clearly a straw man argument because it is not true even on the surface of it. The fact that Jesus chose, trained, and then sent out the twelve apostles with authority to preach and to found and build up churches is accepted by everyone within Christianity; consequently, the assertion above is false (Matt. 28:18–20). The Reformers never rejected authority. The entire argument with the Catholic church revolved around the issue of the proper authority *in* the church. The Roman Catholics referred to the popes, the ecumenical councils, and the bishops as the source of authority for all interpretations of Tradition and Scripture. The Reformers held up the Holy Scriptures alone as the supreme authority in the church; nevertheless, let us continue for the moment.

It is always better to go directly to the sources to interview informed spokespeople rather than outsiders to learn what a group believes. This will be our procedure as we lay a foundation for the discussion of Scripture and Tradition.

Orthodox priest Anthony M. Coniaris describes the importance of a ministry having a historical connection to the apostles:

What do we mean when we use the word "church?" Look at the tremendous variety of groups that call themselves churches. In fact, anyone can [now] establish a church for himself. . . . But are they truly churches? Were they founded by Jesus and the

5. Josef Neuner and Heinrich Roos, *The Teaching of the Catholic Church as Contained in Her Documents*, ed. Karl Rahner, trans. Geoffrey Stevens (Staten Island: Alba House, 1967), 53.

Apostles? What kind of historical connection do they have with the apostles. . . . We Orthodox Christians mean by Church the Body through which Jesus is present in the world today. It was founded by Christ through the Apostles and has maintained a living, historical connection with the Apostles through the ordination of clergy. The fact that the bishop who ordains an Orthodox priest today can trace his ordination historically all the way back to the Apostles and through them to Christ is a guarantee that the Orthodox Church was not founded by someone called Joe Smith a few centuries ago but by Christ Himself and traces its existence back to Jesus.⁶

Are we correct to conclude that his statement, “a living, historical connection with the Apostles,” is another way of speaking of “Holy Tradition” in the Orthodox church? Actually, this idea is called *successionism*, which supposedly guarantees Tradition.⁷

How does the Orthodox church view itself, and how do recent converts view their new church and the denominations they left? Frank Schaeffer wrote a three-hundred-page tome that sets out to prove that, in spite of being the son of the famous evangelical Francis Schaeffer, he discovered evangelicalism to be a religion in which each person is free to follow his own opinions, his personal conscience. Schaeffer takes aim at the multitude of evangelical groups and also the Catholic church, when he writes, “The Church has never seen itself as a chaos of spiritual individualism, let alone as a maelstrom of twenty-three thousand denominations battling for turf, each armed with its own subjective reading of Scripture and its self-invented ‘traditions.’ Nor has the historical Church seen itself as under a dictator or ‘infallible’ pope.”⁸

He speaks out against what he calls the “American Protestant frenzy for self-realization,” which, he says, “built to a fever pitch in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries [when] whole new frontier

6. Anthony M. Coniaris, *Introducing the Orthodox Church* (Minneapolis: Light and Life Pub. Co., 1982), 1, quoted in Frank Schaeffer, *Dancing Alone: The Quest for Orthodox Faith in the Age of False Religion* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994), 149.

7. See the appendix for a further discussion of succession.

8. Frank Schaeffer, *Dancing Alone* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994), 149.

cults, sects and religions were invented practically out of thin air.”⁹

He certainly earns points for colorful writing, with descriptions such as these: “With Christian religion reduced to the level of a sectarian squabble in America,” “the utopian, Protestant-Enlightenment sickness,” and “Americans seem to believe in their Puritan-utopian-millennial enlightened, self-proclaimed goodness, in being converted to see the light, in having some sort of special call or covenant that sets them apart from the normal rules of history.”¹⁰

From the beginning of his book, Schaeffer demonstrates the importance of Tradition in the Orthodox mind as he describes his rationale for leaving his family’s Reformed faith:

A day came when it became clear to me that if I was to believe the history books I was reading, and the writings of the Fathers of the Church, then I had to choose between the Protestant world view and the Holy Tradition. What was obvious was that they were not one and the same. . . .

It seemed to me that we Protestants had deliberately avoided the study of the historical Church and concentrated on endless theological debates. Perhaps theological theories are easier to manipulate than history.¹¹

Another writer who left evangelicalism describes the “pilgrimage” of evangelicals, ministers, and congregations to the Orthodox church. Written by Peter E. Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox* relates the exodus of a number of leaders from the Campus Crusade for Christ ministry. These people were seeking answers, and sincerely so. They wanted to find the New Testament church. Gordon Walker (a former Baptist minister, now an Orthodox priest) says, “For the life of me, I cannot tell you the details of *where* that New Testament Church *went*.”¹² What happened to the New Testament church is a huge question that has caused the shipwreck of many in the ship called

9. *Ibid.*, 123.

10. *Ibid.*, 133, 136, 11.

11. *Ibid.*, 18.

12. Peter E. Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox*, rev. ed. (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar, 1992), 24.

“denominationalism.” Evangelical church members need better education in their faith if they are to refute the confusion that is causing many to lose their way.

Gillquist, who became an Orthodox priest, discloses another reason that led him and his companions to distrust their evangelical experience.

The second reason I trust the Holy Spirit to lead the Church and preserve her traditions is the way He gave us the Holy Scriptures. Not only were the Scriptures written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the books were gathered together under the inspiration of the Spirit.

. . . Though a visible consensus regarding most of the New Testament books existed for years beforehand, it was not until the Synod of Carthage, which met in A.D. 397, that we find the final list of the biblical canon as we know it today.

This is the point. If we can trust the Holy Spirit to guide the Church in discerning the books to be included in the canon of Scripture, then we can trust that He has led the Church in her other decisions as well! And remember—how did the Church know which books were doctrinally sound and thus to be included in the canon? On the basis of the doctrines passed down through holy tradition!

There is no way to take the Scriptures and trash tradition. They come to us as a package.¹³

We see clearly how Orthodox Christians view other churches, even the Roman Catholic Church, when Gillquist opines,

Saddled even more with late tradition is the Protestant movement. Whereas Rome generally added to the faith, Protestantism has subtracted from it. . . .

Mary has become a no-name; holy communion, a quarterly memorial; authority and discipline in the Church, a memory;

13. *Ibid.*, 65–66.

doctrine, a matter of personal interpretation, constantly coming up for renegotiation.¹⁴

Vladimir Lossky provides a short definition of tradition in the Orthodox faith: “Tradition is the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church.”¹⁵ Expanding further on this, Bishop Ware writes, “[Tradition] means the books of the Bible; it means the Creed; it means the decrees of the Ecumenical Councils and the writings of the Fathers; it means the Canons, the Service Books, the Holy Icons—in fact, the whole system of doctrine, Church government, worship, spirituality and art which Orthodoxy has articulated over the ages.”¹⁶

It is important to also take account of the attitudes of the ultra-conservative Orthodox who are not part of mainstream Orthodoxy. Schisms have occurred due to recent trends in ecumenism and modernism, which the hardliners reject as being a betrayal of the true faith. An educated but inflexible spokesman, Father Michael Azkoul, PhD, was a member of several Orthodox churches in the United States before he left them because of their modernist tendencies and ecumenism. He explains what his party believes:

Tradition, which exists only within the Church, contains everything she must profess. Whatever is necessary to believe for salvation is found in her. . . . The sacred content of Tradition is changed neither by what the Fathers have written, nor by the customs of the local Church, nor by the composition of Creeds by the universal Church. These are all witnesses to the immutable Tradition which they expound and defend.¹⁷

Again, the opinion that the Orthodox church is *the* true church shines through when Azkoul explains that “in a word, the Catholic Church has one Faith, while all else is heretical perversion.”¹⁸ This

14. *Ibid.*, 68.

15. Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1974), 152, quoted in Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 2nd rev. ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 198.

16. Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 2nd rev. ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 195–96.

17. Michael Azkoul, *Once Delivered to the Saints* (Seattle: Saint Nectarios Press, 2000), 25.

18. *Ibid.*, 31.

teaching is held by many bishops, priests, and laypeople, and by many of the monks of the influential monastic peninsula of Mount Athos, Greece.

Elder Cleopa of Romania, now deceased, is very much loved and respected for his steadfastness as a Christian during the time the Communists controlled his country. He stated that Tradition “is unerring,” then added, “The Church lived the truth of the Gospel even before anything was committed to writing, having lived with the Holy Tradition from the outset. . . . It carries the same weight as Holy Scripture.”¹⁹

Finally, a reference from an authority in Greece:

The Church teaches and interprets those divine truths brought out in Holy Scripture and Sacred Tradition. Scripture and Tradition, then, are equally valid, possess equal dogmatic authority, and are equal in value as sources of dogmatic truth. The Church’s teaching shows that the Scriptures are in complete harmony with Apostolic Tradition.

Thus, Sacred Tradition is both older and richer than the Scriptures. . . . Thus, as we have said, the Scriptures embody but a small portion of Sacred Tradition, and consequently need to be interpreted and fulfilled in the light of Sacred Tradition.²⁰

These quotations acquaint us with the Orthodox church’s teaching expressed by its saints, articulate theologians, and the evangelicals who have converted to it. According to them, “Holy Tradition” is equal in weight with the Holy Scriptures, preceded the Scriptures, is more complete than the Scriptures, and is equal to the Scriptures as a source of dogma. Thus someone could reasonably pay as much or more attention to Tradition than to the Scriptures if never questioning Tradition.

19. Elder Cleopa, *The Truth of Our Faith*, trans. and ed. Peter Alban Heers (Thessalonica, Greece: Uncut Mountain, 2000), 55.

20. John Karmiris, *A Synopsis of the Dogmatic Theology of the Orthodox Catholic Church*, trans. George Dimopoulos (Scranton: Christian Orthodox Edition, 1973), 5–6.

No wonder a chasm exists between true evangelical Bible believers and Orthodoxy or Roman Catholicism. How is dialogue possible under such circumstances? According to the nineteenth-century Roman Catholic scholar Nicolas Wiseman, the question of what constitutes the rule of faith for Christians is “the heart of the controversy that divides the two religions.”²¹ Because the ancient churches constantly refer to the church fathers as proper interpreters of the Scriptures and ancient church beliefs, we look next at a sampling of the church fathers on Scripture and Tradition.

The Church Fathers on Scripture and Tradition

Made a cardinal shortly before his death, Yves M.-J. Congar, a famous Dominican scholar, led in the revival of patristic studies in the Catholic church. Congar presents several propositions from an earlier writer and summarizes them this way:

In early Christianity there was no *problem* about Scripture and Tradition. Moreover, for the Apostolic Fathers and the apologists, Scripture is the Old Testament whose meaning, it was taken as evident, was entirely christological. The dominant idea was that of faith and of the Church’s preaching or “kerygma”. It was in the Church’s preaching and by the faith that welcomed it that the content of Scripture (that is, the mystery of Jesus Christ the Saviour) was understood. . . . [Here, he summarizes Irenaeus’s views.] Scripture and Tradition have the same content, but under two different aspects and in two states. . . .

In the earliest Fathers, no distinction was made, from the point of view of content, between an *oral* tradition and what is transmitted to us in Scripture, though Tertullian and Origen were well aware that there were things held and practiced in the Church for which Scripture provides no express testimony. This awareness was more distinct and more clearly expressed in the fourth century.²²

21. Nicolas Wiseman, *Conférences sur les doctrines et les pratiques les plus importantes de l’Eglise Catholique*, trans. Alfred Nettement (Paris: Beaujouan et Jourdan, 1839), 1:82–85.

22. Yves M.-J. Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, trans. Michael Naseby and Thomas Rainborough (New York: Macmillan, 1967; San Diego: Basilica, 1997), 377–78. Citations refer to the Basilica edition.

This is what one would expect if any fidelity existed at all in the early years after the church's birth. Teachings orally taught and transmitted would be based upon the content of the gospel and perhaps some oral instructions to presbyters²³ and people. Tradition would certainly not transmit new doctrines or myths never taught by Christ or His apostles. This traditional gospel teaching, preserved by faithful bishops, served as a bulwark against gnostic groups that claimed a special knowledge (*gnosis*) for their speculative teachings. As time passed, the distinction between Scripture and Tradition became ever more pronounced. The church was distancing itself from the apostolic faith as it evolved due to influences from within and without. Professor Norman Cantor remarks,

From one point of view, then, the church thus developed away from pure, apostolic Christianity. On the other hand, it may be claimed that only thus could the church progress, adapting itself to a changing world, to new people and new ideas.

Like the empire, the church worked out a strict system of hierarchy based on levels reminiscent of the Platonic concept of the Chain of Being, the continuous hierarchy between pure matter and pure idea. In the Christian church, obedience was due from priest up to bishop, from bishop to archbishop, and from archbishop up to the pope (father) in the West and the patriarchs in the East. Borrowing Platonic philosophy and the Roman system of government, the church developed the Christian priesthood, with its priests set apart from ordinary men and women.²⁴

During the early centuries there were groups such as Gnostics, Sabellians, Montanists, Manichaeans, and Arians, and all these parties cited the Scriptures. Orthodox, that is, true Christians were obliged to ask, What is the correct principle of interpretation? During the first and second centuries the term "Scriptures" *primarily* meant

23. A presbyters was an official in the early Christian church who served in directing the congregation.

24. Norman F. Cantor, *The Civilization of the Middle Ages* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994), 37, 39.

the Old Testament. The New Testament writings were still in the process of being copied and circulated in different languages throughout the empire.

What did earlier church writers believe? Irenaeus, in his famous book *Against Heresies*, stood firm against the gnostic sects and refuted their idle chatter about secret knowledge, which they claimed to possess. The Gnostics emphasized the role of a secret tradition by which teachings not contained in the written Word were passed on. Refuting them, Irenaeus wrote, “We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith.”²⁵ There can be no doubt that Irenaeus acknowledged the Holy Scriptures as the ground and pillar of Christian faith; further, the church was responsible to only teach publicly the facts of salvation to the world.

Another ancient testimony to Scripture is provided by Tertullian, who, although not a church father, is an important witness to the faith as practiced in North Africa.

Let us be content with saying that Christ died, the Son of the Father; and *let this suffice*, because the Scriptures have told us so much. For even the apostle, to his declaration—which he makes not without feeling the weight of it—that “Christ died,” immediately adds, “according to the Scriptures,” [1 Cor. 15:3] in order that he may alleviate the harshness of the statement by the authority of the Scriptures, and so remove offence from the reader.²⁶

25. Irenaeus of Lyons, “Irenæus Against Heresies,” 3.1.1, in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 414. An interesting discussion on the role of Scripture and Tradition is found in chapter 5 in *Bible, Church, Tradition*, vol. 1 of Collected Works of Fr. Georges Florovsky (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1972). Also quoted in “The Function of Tradition in the Ancient Church,” *Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Luke*, by Cyril Patriarch of Alexandria, trans. R. Payne Smith (Studion Publishers, 1983).

26. Tertullian, “Against Praxeas,” *Latin Christianity*, vol. 3 of The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 625.

Generations later, Athanasius wrote to Macarius, “For although the sacred and inspired Scriptures are sufficient to declare the truth.”²⁷ And John Chrysostom in his *Epistle to the Colossians* would advise,

Tarry not, I entreat, for another to teach thee; thou hast the oracles of God. No man teacheth thee as they; for he indeed oft grudgeth much for vainglory’s sake and envy. Hearken, I entreat you, all ye that are careful for this life, and procure books that will be medicines for the soul. If ye will not any other, yet get you at least the New Testament, the Apostolic Epistles, the Acts, the Gospels, for your constant teachers. If grief befall thee, dive into them as into a chest of medicines; take thence comfort of thy trouble, be it loss, or death, or bereavement of relations; or rather dive not into them merely, but take them wholly to thee; keep them in thy mind.

*This is the cause of all evils, not knowing the Scriptures.*²⁸

It is important to acknowledge that the church fathers recognized the determinative role that the Holy Scriptures played in the refutation of heresies in their church councils. In this way, *right* doctrine was defended. This is the origin of the word *orthodox*, which is formed from *orthos*²⁹ (“right”) and *doxa* (“glory” or “worship”).

A little later, the respected bishop and church father Cyprian of Carthage wrote,

Nor ought custom, which had crept in among some, to prevent the truth from prevailing and conquering; for custom without truth is the antiquity of error. . . . This truth Christ showed to us in His Gospel, and said, “I am the truth” [John 14:6]. Wherefore, if we are

27. Athanasius of Alexandria, “Against the Heathen,” 13, in *St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Archibald T. Robertson, vol. 4, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1892), 4.

28. John Chrysostom, “Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Colossians,” homily 9, in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J. Ashworth and John Albert Broadus, vol. 13, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 300–301.

29. The New Testament uses it four times, where it is translated “plain” and “rightly.”

in Christ, and have Christ in us, if we abide in the truth, and the truth abides in us, let us keep fast those things which are true.³⁰

In an effort to avoid tediousness, only one more testimony will be cited, this time from Hippolytus:

There is, brethren, one God, the knowledge of whom we gain from the Holy Scriptures, and from no other source. For just as a man, if he wishes to be skilled in the wisdom of this world, will find himself unable to get at it in any other way than by mastering the dogmas of philosophers, so all of us who wish to practise piety will be unable to learn its practice from any other quarter than the oracles of God. Whatever things, then, the Holy Scriptures declare, at these let us look; and whatsoever things they teach, these let us learn; and as the Father wills our belief to be, let us believe; and as He wills the Son to be glorified, let us glorify Him; and as He wills the Holy Spirit to be bestowed, let us receive Him. Not according to our own will, nor according to our own mind, nor yet as using violently those things which are given by God, but even as He has chosen to teach them by the Holy Scriptures, so let us discern them.³¹

These numerous quotations provide a glimpse into the earlier church fathers' attitude toward the Word of God.³² This should suffice for fair-minded readers.

Does Tradition Always Conflict with the Word of God?

The Jewish leaders kept certain customs they claimed to have received from Moses. They resisted Jesus, charging Him with trying to change their customs (Acts 6:14; Matt. 15:1–15). That was foolishness on their part. There is nothing wrong with tradition as long as it is not

30. Cyprian of Carthage, "The Epistles of Cyprian," 73.9, in *Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Novatian, Appendix*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Robert Ernest Wallis, vol. 5, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 389. Cyprian disagrees with Steven, bishop of Rome, concerning the baptism of heretics.

31. Hippolytus, "Against the Heresy of One Noetus," *Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian*, vol. 5 of *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 227.

32. Keith Mathison, "The Early Church," *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2001). Also, Yves M.-J. Congar's *Tradition and Traditions* includes many references to the church fathers.

harmful or a distortion of anything that Christ or His apostles laid down as necessary to belief or practice. For example, suits and ties are a traditional manner of dressing for church but are not harmful in any way. To respect such a tradition is a matter of taste, culture, and choice. It does not go against any Biblical principle to respect this style of dressing, but to insist upon our tradition or tastes in a hot and humid climate, such as in Louisiana and Florida or Asia and Africa, could be considered a lack of respect for the inhabitants of those places.

Socrates Scholasticus (ca. AD 440), an early church historian, gave an interesting account of the liberty that the apostles allowed to the churches, and he spoke of various customs that existed in the early church, as well as speaking of the dispute over the date for celebrating Easter.

The aim of the apostles was not to appoint festival days, but to teach a righteous life and piety. And it seems to me that just as many other customs have been established in individual localities according to usage. So also the feast of Easter came to be observed in each place according to the individual peculiarities of the peoples inasmuch as none of the apostles legislated on the matter. And that the observance originated not by legislation, but as a custom the facts themselves indicate.³³

Scholasticus was still able to breathe a refreshing air of spiritual liberty, which was rapidly disappearing due to the sacralization and consolidation of Christianity as a state religion.

In his *Ecclesiastical History* (ca. AD 300–325), Eusebius writes about Papias, who is said to have known the presbyter John (the apostle?). This is very important if we are to understand how easily erroneous traditions crept into the church and later came to be thought of as ancient apostolic traditions. Eusebius was only two hundred years removed from Papias when he wrote,

33. Socrates Scholasticus, "The Ecclesiastical History, by Socrates Scholasticus," 5.22, in *Socrates, Sozomenus: Church Histories*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. A. C. Zenos, vol. 2, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890), 130.

The same writer gives also other accounts which he says came to him through *unwritten tradition*, certain strange parables and teachings of the Saviour, and some other more *mythical things*. To these belong his statement that there will be a period of some thousand years after the resurrection of the dead, and that the kingdom of Christ will be set up in material form on this very earth. I suppose he got these ideas through a misunderstanding of the apostolic accounts, not perceiving that the things said by them were spoken mystically in figures. For he appears to have been of very limited understanding, as one can see from his discourses. But it was due to him that so many of the Church Fathers after him adopted a like opinion, urging in their own support the antiquity of the man; as for instance Irenaeus and any one else that may have proclaimed similar views.³⁴

In all this, let us listen to the advice of our beloved apostle Paul: “Test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thess. 5:21).

Whom Should We Believe?

The church father Basil of Caesarea said, “Let God-inspired Scripture decide between us; and on whichever side be found doctrines in harmony with the word of God, in favour of that side will be cast the vote of truth.”³⁵ Yet the Roman Catholic claim to be “the Mother of the Bible” easily gives the impression that the church believes in its superiority over the Bible. Catholicism assumes that because the Bible belongs to Rome, the church can permit or not permit the laity to read the Bible and that she alone determines the correct interpretation of the Scriptures.

Such ideas are the cause of the church’s many deviations from the apostolic faith. Of course, Catholics reiterate the claim that

34. Eusebius of Caesaria, “The Church History of Eusebius,” 3:39.11–13, in *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, vol. 1, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890), 172. My italics.

35. Basil of Caesarea, “Letters,” 189.3, in *St. Basil: Letters and Select Works*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Blomfield Jackson, vol. 8, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1895), 229.

development is natural to any living organism, that these developments are natural, a growth to maturity of the seed of faith. Rome teaches that she is the only authorized interpreter of the Bible because she is infallibly guided and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The Orthodox church claims as much for herself.

Rebelling against the burdens and superstitions of the Middle Ages, Europe's peoples sought relief in the Reformation cry of "Christ alone, Scripture alone!" But the Roman church bitterly resisted calls for ecclesiastical reforms. The result was a splintering and breaking up of the European church-state union that had existed since Charlemagne's time. In any case, every Christian should examine his religious ideas by applying the rule of faith that church fathers Basil and Irenaeus acknowledged: the Holy Scriptures.

The argument from antiquity is not always as strong as it may appear at first. The fact that an idea is ancient does not make it right. Scholars who engage in textual criticism are well aware of this as they sort through ancient manuscript copies and classify the variants they encounter. Although a variant may be ancient, it may have been written by a heretic or have entered the textual history due to a gloss (a comment or explanation placed in the margin of a manuscript).

Why We Reject Tradition with a Capital T

The acceptance of church traditions as part of the "deposit of faith" has proven to be a source of bondage. In many cases, Tradition conflicts with the Word of God. The matter of blind obedience to men is the result of esteeming leaders as more than they are. The laws they impose upon people who should be enjoying freedom in Christ have caused many heartaches, as good, sincere men and women strive to obey church laws, or in order to be accepted, they blindly follow what their parents practiced. The apostle Paul addressed this matter in several of his letters:

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1).

“But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain” (Gal. 4:9–11).

“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind” (Col. 2:16–18).

It is an arduous task to study church history and the church fathers to verify the teachings of the ancient churches, to determine whether they are or are not apostolic in origin. Hopefully this work will help sincere individuals who are troubled or feel under pressure from relatives and friends who seek to persuade them to “get with it, stay in the church Jesus Christ founded.” Surprisingly, even professional historians admit the difficulty of ascertaining what is accurate fact from the early centuries of church history. Jaroslav Pelikan, professor emeritus of church history, concludes,

Yet the task of reconstructing it [apostolic doctrine] from the existing documents is a complex one. . . .

Another set of problems in the study of the state of Christian doctrine in the second and third centuries is raised by the literary and historical analysis of the documents. The manuscript tradition of the epistles of Ignatius contains two and even three recensions of his works, varying not only in length and style but also in doctrinal content. . . . Similarly, the garbled transmission of the manuscripts of Cyprian’s *Unity of the Church* has raised questions about his doctrine of the primacy of Peter. . . .

These literary problems, which could be multiplied almost endlessly through these two centuries and well beyond them, jeopardize any history of the early development of Christian

doctrine that proceeds from one thinker to the next, tracing origins, influences, borrowings, and divergences.³⁶

Is this not reason enough to look to the Holy Scriptures for guidance as we seek to live as Christians filled with the Holy Spirit?

By What Authority?

Evangelicals often hear an objection proffered by the ancient churches' apologists: "An infallible Bible needs an infallible interpreter." This simply means that the Roman or the Orthodox church is such an interpreter. Paul's statement that the "church of the living God [is] the pillar and ground of the truth" is cited in support of this teaching. Theologian Keith Mathison replies to such an argument based on 1 Timothy 3:15:

The words he [the apostle Paul] uses describe a structural foundation. . . .

It is also important to note that the Church is not identical to the truth (John 17:17). Jesus is the truth (John 14:6), and the Word of God is truth (John 17:17), but the Church is not identical to the truth. She is the pillar and ground of truth in the sense that she is called to uphold and proclaim the truth, but she is distinguished from the truth she upholds. This is important because 1 Timothy 3:15 is often used by Roman Catholic apologists to support an ecclesiology which either subordinates Scripture to the Church or else puts the Church on an equal level of authority with the Scripture. . . . The Church is the place where the truth may be found, but it is the truth which has the ultimate authority.³⁷

Mathison quotes a Roman Catholic apologist who argued that "if Scripture is infallible, then its cause, the Church, must be infallible." Mathison puts that argument to rest with this comment: "But if that is the case, then an infallible Old Testament requires an infallible Israel."

36. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)*, vol. 1 of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 121–22.

37. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 204.

... The infallibility of both Testaments is due to the inspiration of the infallible Holy Spirit.”³⁸

Many Orthodox theologians consider the church fathers to be infallible guides whenever they are agreed on any particular point. I believe that the church fathers are important as a source of information about what the church taught at a particular point in time. Not everything in their writings should be rejected, but not everything should be accepted. Discernment is needed. I also believe the church fathers were men who loved Christ. They were closer in time to the apostles and to the language of the Bible, and we should acknowledge our indebtedness to them for the structure they gave to the Christian faith as they responded to philosophical and heretical attacks on Christian doctrine. Sometimes their advice on spirituality may be helpful, but too often their monasticism and methods reek of a gnostic antipathy for the physical body. This is known as warfare against fleshly passions, which they were striving to master. For this reason, such writings should be avoided.

It is evident that any dialogue between the ancient churches and the evangelical churches turns on one point: *authority*. Cardinal Wiseman stated as much in the 1830s in his public lectures that were later published as *Conferences on Protestantism*. Regarding authority, we invite our traditionalist friends to consider one more statement from church father John Chrysostom, who advised his listeners to be wary of others.

For how is it not absurd that in respect to money, indeed, we do not trust to others, but refer this to figures and calculation; but in calculating upon facts we are lightly drawn aside by the notions of others; and that too, though we possess an exact balance, and square and rules for all things, the declaration of the divine laws? *Wherefore I exhort and entreat you all, disregard what this man and that man thinks about these things, and inquire from the Scriptures all these things; and having learnt what are the true riches, let us pursue after them that*

38. *Ibid.*, 293–94.

we may obtain also the eternal good things; which may we all obtain, through the grace and love towards men of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom, to the Father and the Holy Spirit, be glory, might, and honor, now and ever, and world without end. Amen.³⁹

Would that we all could always adhere to such good advice!

If issues must be decided by both the Word of God *and* Tradition, we should all join an ancient liturgical church. But if infallible truth is found *only* in the inspired Word of God, we must look to God's Word for infallible guidance. Consequently, *sola scriptura* is not an empty slogan. Christians should reject the liturgical churches' claims to occupy the historical ground because their history does not go far enough back, that is, to the apostolic era! Their "gospel" cannot be considered good news; it is *another* gospel (Gal. 1). This is why we invite the members of liturgical churches to seek a church that teaches *Christ alone, faith alone, grace alone, and Scripture alone*. A number of essential matters will be taken up when we survey the culture and philosophies of the time of Christ. The church grew up in a hostile world, where Platonism, gnosticism, and mystery religions offered alternative ways of viewing life and the hereafter. It is important to uncover the influences that such an environment may have had on Christianity, its worship, and the celebration of the sacraments.

39. John Chrysostom, "Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Second Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians," homily 13, in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J. Ashworth and Talbot B. Chambers, vol. 12, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 346. My italics.